

Self, Time, and the Quest for God
in Selected Essays, Stories and Poems
by Jorge Luis Borges

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Abstract

The thesis argues that the quest for God, though largely unheeded by the critical canon, was a major and enduring preoccupation for Borges. His reflections on time and identity are symptomatic of a deeper, spiritual searching which can only be answered by a Divine Absolute. A secondary aim is to trace the chronology of these reflections on the self, temporality and the Absolute. This chronological dimension has not received the attention it deserves, but it is of vital importance in establishing the links between these three inter-related preoccupations.

The total of five chapters is divided into two parts. Part One constitutes a detailed, chronological analysis of Borges' essays. Part Two examines the stories as organic explorations of the essayistic themes. Chapter I studies the texts of the early 1920s as first instances of Borges' philosophical explorations. Chapter II traces the essays up to the mid-1930s in order to establish the correlation between Borges' notion of time and selfhood, as well as the further link to the concept of God, as evident in Borges' concern with the Cabbala and Gnosticism. Chapter III analyses the essays from 1936 to the early 1950s to explain how certain dualities are at the heart of Borges' explorations. Mystical texts, from Buddhist, Sufi, and Christian spiritual traditions are discussed as evidence of a progression in Borges' search. Chapter IV traces the development from essay to fiction. It identifies the interplay of themes between the genres, and demonstrates the continuities between them. Chapter V examines those stories which exemplify the quest for the Divine in the context of the fragmentation of personal, textual, and authorial identities.

The Conclusion further consolidates the links between the themes under discussion, and argues that their reappearance in the late poetry is an indication of Borges' ever-deepening spiritual search.

This thesis is entirely my own work
and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

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Introduction

Readers have always been captivated by the sheer intellectual stimulus both underlying and emanating from Borges' work. Of his vast essayistic and fictional output, it is the latter, notably the stories of *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*, which have held the greater sway over readers and critics alike. The seeming ease with which Borges delineates a mental and physical universe of the *as if*; his controlled storylines and carefully, minimally drawn characters; the calculated coolheadedness which pervades so much of his work: these are elements which seduce the reader into a deliberately constructed world of parallel lives, deaths, and pasts; of fragmented characters and multiple destinies; of a reality in constant flux; and of a text which, as the reader engages with it, seems to both multiply and disintegrate.

But in spite of their brevity and succinctness, the stories raise complex questions which belie their carefully controlled playfulness and their confident grace. It is thus tempting - and perhaps not entirely unintentional by Borges - to marvel at the intellectual artistry, the audaciousness, the elegance employed to convey, without setting them out in an overt manner, the complexity and unanswerability of fundamental questions: the nature of reality; the unfathomable yet inescapable nature of time; absolute truth; and notions of personal and textual identity. Yet these are more than points of arrival: they are points of departure for the reader's exploration of, and engagement with the emanating wealth of those issues which Borges is careful not to name himself. More so: Borges' texts are points of departure for a close analysis of Borges' underlying motives, which are at once compelling and vexing.

This thesis aims to argue that the fictions are organic explorations of the essayistic themes; it will be shown how Borges uses the story medium - which, unlike the essay, has the added freedom of the imagination, and thus fewer constraints imposed by reality and rationality - as a creative plane to enact the *as if*. The chronology and evolution of Borges' philosophical and theological explorations over a period of thirty years will be traced, and an analysis provided of both the essays and *ficciones*, an analysis which establishes the link between essayistic and fictional work and which makes it possible to distil and elaborate on key philosophical concerns. The

particular emphasis of the analysis on time and identity, and on the correlation between them, has proved rewarding and reveals a further key element which underlies both of these Borgesian concerns: the quest for an Absolute, both in its literal meaning, and in a more discreet, metaphorical sense, which I will show to be linked to Borges' particular notion of personal self.

The texts chosen are a selection of those essays which Borges wrote between the early 1920s - texts which have not received much attention - and the early 1950s. These earliest essays are published in *Textos recobrados: 1919-1929* (1997), *Inquisiciones* (1925), *Discusión* (1932), *Historia de la eternidad* (1936), and *Otras Inquisiciones* (1952). At the heart of the ensuing analysis of Borges' fictional work are the stories of the 1930s and the 1940s, published in *Ficciones: El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (1941/42), *Ficciones: Artificios* (1944/56), and in *Ei Aleph* (1949/52). The key debates underlying this study are those which are concerned with Borges' work from a philosophical and / or theological point of view.

The spellings, as well as the system of referencing adopted follow the MHRA *Style Book* recommendations for citation by the author-date system (1999, 14 and 52 respectively). All underlined emphases within quotations are my own.

Structure and Purpose of the Study

The Introduction concludes with a critical evaluation of the scholarly debate on Borges. The total of five chapters is divided into two parts. Part One relates to the essays, Part Two to the stories. Chapters I to III (of Part One) deal with the essays from 1922 to 1953. Chapters IV and V (of Part Two) constitute a study of the stories of the 1930s, 40s and early 1950s in relation to the essays previously analysed.

Chapter I examines the essays of the early 1920s, where Borges starts exploring major philosophical themes when he declares the nothingness of self and of God. These themes can be seen to be of an enduring nature, taken up time and time again in the course of more than half a century of his writing. Chapter II traces the

texts of the late 1920s to the mid-1930s. This is a period which, it will be argued, is a prelude to mysticism, when Borges also introduces the themes of infinity and the paradox, and starts branching into theological territory with texts on the Cabbala and on Gnosticism. This is also the time when he starts to explore and modify major philosophical doctrines with the first of his discussions of Nietzsche's Eternal Return. Chapter III analyses what I view as crucial texts of the year 1936, a year which marks a significant shift in Borges' essayistic explorations, and which coincides with a shift from writing essays towards writing some of his most memorable fictions. The subsequent analysis spans the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, where Borges' explorations of the themes of time, eternity, Platonic archetypes and God reach their height. This is also when Borges introduces Sufism and Buddhism into his writing, and further explores Gnosticism; a time also when, as I aim to demonstrate, a crucial tension between immanence and transcendence becomes apparent in his writing. The significance of this tension will also be elaborated on in this chapter.

Chapter IV provides a bridge between the essays and the stories and shows how the fictions are organic explorations of the essayistic themes. It identifies the interplay of themes between the genres and demonstrates the continuity over the decades between them. In addition, the chapter re-visits certain key essays and provides a further analysis under the aspects of the duality of Borges' sense of personal self and the link to his concept of the Divine. Chapter V investigates those *ficciones* which reveal Borges' preoccupation with notions of God, and a link will be delineated between the presence of the Divine in his stories and the concept of identity. The earliest of the stories underlying this particular analysis dates from 1936 and as such coincides with the writing of what can be deemed crucial essays of *Historia de la eternidad*. The latest of the stories analysed, 'El fin', dates from 1953 and coincides with 'Nota al prólogo' of 1952, a postscript to 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', which is the last of the essays explored. It marks a point of closure in Borges' story writing, a point in time after which he does not write fictions for another decade.

In these earlier stories of the 1930s and 1940s, two major themes can be detected which Borges works in many different ways. These are the quest for God on the one hand, and plurality of self on the other. In the presence of, or with the

possibility of an Absolute, Borges' characters engage in a quest for this very Absolute, which, I argue, results in failure, and ultimately in the fragmentation of self. At this point in the study, I will have hoped to offer a final consolidation of the analyses of the Divine in Borges' work, and the link between this quest for God and the themes of time and identity.

The Conclusion points to the continuity of Borges' explorations, and to the poems from the 1950s to the 1980s. These poems are intensely condensed, distilled versions of his ideas and concerns; they are deceptively simple and clear, yet have a depth of multiple layers, which allows for multiple readings. It is all the more surprising that such few scholars should study Borges' later work¹. The poems referred to (listed chronologically and printed in the Appendix) include, amongst others, 'El Golem' (1958), 'Juan I, 14' (two poems of 1954 and 1969), 'Milonga de dos hermanos' (1965), 'El espejo' (1976), 'Eclesiastés, 1-9' (1981), and 'Cristo en la cruz' (1984). Borges' poems are personal and intimate, yet never self-proclamatory. They are self-revealing, and as such mark an opening, away from the self-concealing voice, which he had adopted in his essays and in the stories of *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*. His poetic work reveals that Borges cannot abandon the concerns, which he explored intellectually in the essayistic period, and creatively in his fiction writing. His later poems also reveal a poetic voice, which, in contrast to previous voices adopted, allows for the quest and also the longing for the Divine object of the search to be gleaned more openly.

As well as setting out a synchronic analysis, the thesis aims to provide a diachronic perspective; this accounts for the progression from a discussion of the essays, which display a clear evolution in time, to analysing the fictions, which are less clearly progressive, and thus require a more synchronic approach. I am aiming to show how the abiding themes of time and identity, which Borges explores, both in his essays and his early stories, and which he battles with throughout all of his creative life, are, in their essence, an expression of his desire to find a release from what he perceives as vexing concepts. In addition to what has remained equally unexplored by

¹ Although Ignacio Navarro's 'El más extraño de los hombres' (1997) marks a welcome shift by paying considerable attention to some of Borges' poems from the 1960s to the 1980s.

the critical canon, this study provides one further aspect to its arguments. It argues not only for the recognition of the quest for the Divine in Borges' stories, the unfulfilled spiritual quest of his characters, but also holds that this spiritual component is more than decorative. It can be shown to drive both the story and its author. The quest for God is, as I will argue, more still than this: as well as engaging in a spiritual quest, which in itself is an oblique endeavour and underlies more obvious and literal themes, the quest for a union of the self with an Absolute is also a metaphor which Borges uses in order to explore what I hold is his particular notion of personal self. This is based on an analysis which traces the earliest textual evidence to an essay of the early 1920s, 'La nadería de la personalidad'. In this text, Borges' deeply emotional desire to reveal his soul gives way to a vehement, intellectual denial of that very essence of the self. This almost violent shift from yearning to denial points, I shall argue, to a sense of self which is, in its essence, wounded.

Although Borges' intellect denies the notion of selfhood, the same intellect affirms to him that he cannot escape it. This traps him in an oscillation between denial and resignation. The textual evidence points to a further tension still: on the one hand there is the desire to affirm the self in its individuated state, which results in either plurality or fragmentation; on the other hand there is evidence of a desire for the individual self to be absorbed, contained within a higher Self, a Reality of plenitude and oneness all at once. These tensions are further indications of a wounded sense of personal self. Borges' quest is therefore both for God and for healing.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on establishing a chronology of Borges' writing, and, subsequently, on chronologising the debate surrounding it. This reveals an evolution of thought within Borges' philosophical explorations (and almost always his modification of ideas) and allows for the tracing of a trajectory of thought over time. In the course of this study, the status of Borges' essays will be raised. An analysis and exploration of both the essays and fictions is necessary and will prove invaluable in establishing the link, as well as the continuous interplay between them. Borges, it will be argued, engages in a constant dialogue with the themes of time and identity, moving between and within his own genres, whose boundaries are at times famously stretched and blurred. On close analysis, not only are the themes of time and identity - personal, textual, and authorial identity - omnipresent in Borges' work, but a

distinct presence of the Divine, or the search for such, can also be discerned. This has not received adequate attention. Equally rewarding is an analysis of the marked absence of the Absolute, the consequences of which Borges can be seen to explore in the fictions.

Although the themes of time and identity have been identified, and indeed discussed, by the critical canon, an analysis of the crucial link between time and identity is overdue. This will reveal how, for Borges, notions of temporality and selfhood lead to fragmentation of self, text, and author. Subsequently, a link becomes evident, not only between time and identity, but also between time and identity on the one hand, and the Divine on the other. Borges can be seen to make the distinction between time and eternity (which is an attribute of the Divine) only very gradually. This analysis aims to show how Borges understands time and the abhorred notion of infinity (which he seems to perceive as one particular aspect of time and which he holds to be a manifestation of the illusory construct we deem to be reality) as being in irreconcilable opposition to the notion of eternity. Similarly, an analysis of his debate around the concept of identity reveals how, for him, the notion of an individuated self is juxtaposed to - and more so, is irreconcilable with - the notion of the union of the self with the Absolute.

The stories in particular - in the guise of altering the character's past, identity, or death - reveal a marked presence of the themes of salvation and redemption. These themes are inextricably linked to both Borges' and his characters' quests for a higher, spiritual reality. But a careful analysis of Borges' exploration of mystical concepts also reveals how he operates a fatal tension between immanence and transcendence, between pantheism and mysticism. This tension is at the heart of Borges' particular rendering of mystical concepts, which is also at the heart of his characters' difficulty in reaching spiritual fulfilment. I aim to demonstrate that the unfulfilled spiritual quest which his characters embark on in the stories corresponds to a very particular, and typically Borgesian sense of self, defined as being in tension between denial of the notion of self (nothingness), resignation into its inescapability, instability, and fragmentation (solitude), and the longing for a union of the self with the Divine (plenitude). In their quest for God, Borges' characters engage in a process whereby

the Divine is often searched for, or apprehended, in the form of an object. This renders it quasi magical, and is shown, within the story itself, to be ineffective, incomplete, and at times injurious. This objectification of the Divine accounts for the failure to achieve permanent union, enlightenment, or salvation. His characters, and Borges himself, thus abdicate both spiritual and - by extension to what I will show is a further, metaphorical level - personal power to objects or unreachable entities, the jaguar, the aleph, the very process of writing, a woman's love, which and who cannot bring about the desired salvation and healing.

This abdication is at once a flaw, which is at the heart of his characters' failure, but it also serves as a pointer, by means of which Borges' own approach becomes transparent. As a result, the reader is in a position to engage with the author's quest: s/he is enabled, delicately and unobtrusively prompted to uncover Borges' own flaws. An unspoken dialogue commences which communicates pointers from the author to the receptive reader, who, in turn, assists in the unfolding of motives, which are not openly named. Another obstacle to spiritual fulfilment is the tension in Borges' texts between knowledge and experience, which corresponds to a tension between intellect and intuition.

The objectification of the Divine, the omission of God and of faith in both his own, essayistic explorations, and in his characters' mystical quests are pointers which Borges weaves in to his own approach. As they are deliberate fissures in his construct, they can be unveiled. These pointers can thus be equated with the paradox, which is another favourite Borgesian theme and which, in itself, is a means by which the fissures of logic are revealed.

And so, on close analysis, Borges' explorations in his essays and his characters' quests for union with the Divine in his stories reveal themselves as metaphors. As such, there are various levels discernible in Borges' writing. The visible, literal level on the one hand; a more oblique level which points to a spiritual need on the other; and a still more discreet, metaphorical level. This accounts for a very particular Borgesian labyrinth. The labyrinth as a theme in Borges' work has been much commented upon. Little explored, however, is the multi-layered depth of

his particular labyrinth, which goes beyond the oft stated, familiar metaphor for personal disorientation. Borges' labyrinth is, in its essence, twofold and relates to the several levels of his text (literal, oblique, and metaphorical). His labyrinth is at once self-constructed and autonomous. As a self-construct, it is controlled and determined by the author; as an autonomous construct it takes on a dynamic of its own which as such eludes authorial control.

A survey of critical texts shows that for the last fifteen years a definite trend has been developing amongst scholars towards a positive evaluation of the philosophical aspect of Borges' work, and indeed of the philosophies put forward directly or indirectly by him. An evaluation of this particular aspect of the critical debate is provided in the second part of the Introduction. But despite these positive appraisals, the interplay between the essayistic and the fictional work benefits greatly from a more detailed and systematic analysis. Not only can the same themes be identified in the stories, but also the stories are in fact further explications of Borges' essays. Lastly, a recognition and an analysis of the evolution, the progression of Borges' thought has been neglected, and will benefit from critical attention, an analysis which will reveal a worldview far more profound and personal than 'merely' cerebral, as often is intimated by the critical canon. Borges' own debate, carefully constructed and conducted, reveals that his approach is deeply *engagé*, passionate (though not overtly so), and, although dismissing the notions of self, time and God altogether in his early years of writing, Borges does engage with these very concepts just a few years later, after which his explications become increasingly anguished with time in what I aim to argue is a search for transcendence. His exploration of the essayistic and fictional themes culminate with the poems of the 1970s and 1980s, speaking of a very personal and anguished longing to apprehend the presence of, indeed the desire for a transcendental union into a higher, absolute reality. This is the underlying, driving force for Borges' writing: the search for a spiritual dimension, for a union with a Divine reality. Yet, what emanates from Borges' texts is a God who, on one level, is named only to be denied, belittled, proved improbable, and rendered an intellectual or logical impossibility, while the same God is, on a still deeper level, the very presence most searched for.

Self, time, and the quest for God: these are the driving forces, which are intimately linked to much of Borges' writing and to his searching. Although not explicit, the presence of the God figure, or the desire for such, or indeed, the marked absence, pervades much of his writing. Furthermore, the spiritual element has, up until now, not been fully recognised nor analysed in all its significance. The critical focus has mainly been on the stories. Yet Borges' essays, in particular the much neglected ones of the 1920s, deserve more focus, as they are a manifestation of particularly enduring themes which are part of an abiding quest which can be traced all along all of Borges' creative writing, in essayistic, fictional, and poetic form. I hope to demonstrate that the essays inform and in turn are informed by the fictions. It is for this reason that the present study will analyse the essays, from the earliest period of writing in the 1920s to the essays of the 1940s and early 50s, before proceeding to an analysis of the fictions of the 1930s and 40s. A chronology of the essays thus reveals a chronology and an evolution of thought, which exemplifies and allows for the tracing of Borges' attempts at finding answers. He can be seen to abandon this approach when he shifts his creativity to writing fictions, which display a less obviously chronological progression. As such, the thirty years spanning the early 1920s to the early 1950s offer a most distinct, exemplary insight into what compels Borges in his writing.

Much stated, not least by Borges himself, is his debt to philosophers and philosophical ideas (Schopenhauer, Bradley, Nietzsche's Eternal Return, Idealism), and to theological doctrines (Christian and Judaic, Islamic and Buddhist), and he takes extraordinary liberties in his creative appropriation of ideas. From the earliest, impetuous formulations of the early 1920s through to the mature and astute articulations displayed in the texts of the 1940s and 50s, a trajectory of critical thought is revealed, whereby Borges consistently affirms some doctrines over time, while persistently transforming others. In this, Borges seems to be driven by a searching mind which not only investigates philosophical claims, but challenges and takes issue with Berkeley, Nietzsche, Leibniz and, in fact, with Schopenhauer himself. Although much cited in academic discussions, few scholars, notably Roberto Paoli (1975), have noted this divergence from Schopenhauer, whom Borges acknowledges to have been influenced by most profoundly. Engaging in a passionate and, at times,

anguished debate, the essays of the period between 1922 and 1953 reveal a longing, accompanied by a certain apprehension to establish conclusively a definitive answer to the nature - if not to the existence - of time, reality, identity, and the Absolute.

Borges' preoccupation with philosophers and theological concepts goes further still than challenging their particular claims. Borges both modifies and transforms them. There is evidence, both in the early essays in *Inquisiciones* and also in the texts of the 1940s, that Borges was gravitating towards his own philosophical credo, most notably in his divergence from Schopenhauer's and Berkeley's Idealism, but also in his battling with the Eternal Return, and in his life-long fascination with Platonic Forms. Over the course of several decades, Borges thus proposes his very own, very particular version of Idealism which Juan Nuño calls 'ese idealismo de los instantes y las fugacidades' (1986, 138-139). Borges carves out his own preferred version of the Eternal Return; and, in engaging intensely with both the Platonic and the Aristotelian concepts of Ideas or Forms in the course of three decades, he eventually arrives at reconciliation, and appreciation of Platonic Archetypes. This move from dismissal to embrace can be seen as a manifestation of Borges' gravitation towards a notion of faith reality.

Brief Chronology

The period between **1922** and **1925** is marked in Borges' essayistic writing by the denial of time and of self. Whereas in these early years he flatly, and vehemently, denies notions of time and of selfhood, he does, in the course of the subsequent decades, develop a more differentiated approach to these concepts. While he still arrives at a fundamental denial, this is done through a process of arguing, debating, postulating and refuting, a more mature approach, whose evolution and progression can be traced chronologically. This tension - between the refutation of time and identity in the early 1920s on the one hand, and resignation in the 1940s to their inescapability on the other - is only ever relieved in a few privileged, almost mystical moments of transcendence when Borges records a personal experience of timelessness, eternity and the release from individuation in what I would argue is a crucial text of **1928**, entitled 'Sentirse en muerte'. While a year later he arrives back at the

conclusion of the non-existence of God and time, the three years between **1928** and **1931** see him explore, instead of simply deny, the concept of time in the light of the notion of infinity, before arriving in 1934 at the vexing explorations of the notion of cyclical time.

‘La duración del infierno’ and ‘La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga’, both of **1929**, introduce the themes of the paradox, and of infinity. This analysis will show that there is a link between the loss of personal identity and the notion of infinity (as yet not differentiated by Borges from eternity), a manifestation of time *en abîme*. Borges’ very attempts at finding order, universal design, or answers reveal to him the fissures through which he must perceive the futility of any system claiming to answer the problem of chaos and uncertainty. It is the counter-intuitive logic of the paradox, which reveals to us these disjunctions in our carefully constructed reality so that the artifice of time, space and identity is exposed for what it is: forever artifice, forever mirage. Borges, ‘torn between the splendour and the despair afforded by the paradox’ (Sarlo 1993, 58) returns, time and time again, to probe the consequences of the concept of infinity - the *regressus ad infinitum*, or what Sarlo calls ‘structure *en abîme*’ (1993, 56) - which threatens causality, teleology, order, motion, and hence time. Thus juxtaposed, yet inextricably linked to the notion of eternity is his concern with the paradox. I will argue that the paradox, itself a perpetrator of infinity (that is of perpetuity without the Divine) is, on a deeper level still, a metaphor for the perpetual, unrelieved tension between Borges’ sense of the nothingness of his self, and the desire to be contained in an Absolute. This tension is what I term woundedness. In other words: infinity - that which the paradox is concerned with, that which it perpetrates, and also that which is its crux - is a pointer to Borges’ metaphor.

In the **early 1930s** Borges explores Jewish mystical notions in ‘Una vindicación de la Cábala’, and Gnosticism as a heretical system of ultimate knowledge and salvation in ‘Una vindicación del falso Basilides’, which is where he introduces the themes of knowledge and enlightenment, salvation, faith, and concepts of God. This interest in the early 1930s in Gnosticism and Cabalistic wisdom attests to a growing interest in spiritual wisdom and notions of heresy, an interest which continues to be manifest through the 1940s to the 50s, 70s and 80s (see for example

the following essays: 'La flor de Coleridge' of 1945; 'Del culto de los libros' of 1951; essay and poem 'El Golem' I and II of 1957 and 1958 respectively; 'La cábala' of 1977; 'El Simurgh y el águila' of 1982). Thus, in the course of more than five decades, Borges continues to explore concerns which he first raised in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In these early essays, Borges' emphasis is on the nature of God. Linked to the nature of the Divine is the theme of knowledge of the Supreme God, and of salvation through the spiritual enlightenment of the elect. The theme of the elect runs in Borges' work, even though neither he himself (as evidenced through his essays) nor his characters (in his stories) seem to be amongst the elect.

The adaptation of, and variance from, Nietzsche's Eternal Return of the Same in 'La doctrina de los ciclos' of 1934, together with his application of the Leibnizean Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, lead Borges to re-affirm his conclusion, expressed in the early essays of the 1920s, that the concepts of time and self are null and void. This logic, furnished and supported by his intellectual mind, is, however, in constant conflict with the limitations of the very intellect that gives rise to the refutation of time and self, and which does not allow for actually experiencing the very claims (as to the non-existence of time and identity) it puts forward. In other words: for Borges, the notions of reality, time and self, albeit illusory, are nonetheless inescapable in that they constitute, and are necessary for our apprehension of this world of experience and of representation. What Borges is thus left with is a sense of teleological futility and of nothingness. 'La doctrina de los ciclos' can be seen as a prelude to Borges' own alternative to infinite cycles, put forward, a decade later, with 'El tiempo circular'.

Around 1936, Borges can be seen to have reached an impasse, and in the face of the perceived limitations of his essayistic explorations, he resorts to writing fictions. And so the stories are part of a continuum from that wealth of essays where Borges explored questions of identity, the problem of evil, the Trinitarian Mystery, notions of God, concepts of salvation and redemption. From the mid-1930s onwards, Borges moves away from the circularity of his philosophical speculations and theological probings, which characterise the essayistic work and whose intellectual explorations had become ever more complex, passionate and anguished with time. Thus, in the

absence of any lasting aesthetic or mystical transcendence in the realm of the textual Borges (that is the implied author-character-narrator of the stories, who in many instances is a Borges character of sorts, either by name or by obvious analogies to the author), he turns to writing fictions in an attempt to emulate, or reflect these absences in his characters' experiences. It is also in his stories that Borges both re-works and anticipates the teleological barrenness which characterises his essays. It is in his stories that the nullification of identity in infinite, perpetual time finds another expression. It is also in the stories that the presence of a flawed God, or the marked absence of God (or at any rate of an absolute reality) suggests the yearning not just for the transcendence of time and individuation, but of a transcendence into a higher, spiritual reality, a Divine being. And so, from essay to *ficción*, Borges' own explorations into notions of Godhood, and the unfulfilled spiritual quest of his characters for a union with the Divine is more than an accessory to plot. It is also a metaphor which points to a need to heal a damaged sense of personal self. At that point in the study, there then follows an exploration of several analogies established previously in the course of the thesis: between God, eternity, and time and infinity on the one hand; and the healed self, the notion of soul, and fragmented selves on the other.

And so from the **mid-1930s** onwards, Borges' focus on eternity as an attribute of the Absolute, the Divine or Transcendent, becomes ever more apparent. It is a theme which he is to rework in many different guises and variations. It is in one of his most significant essays of 1936, 'Historia de la eternidad', Borges introduces the notion of eternity into the debate, and in analysing his explorations, it becomes possible to establish a link between time and individuation, and equally so between eternity and union. In the mid- to late 1930s Borges seeks new ways of satisfying his yearning for transcending the limitations of the mind, and, along with the mind, the abhorred yet inescapable notions of time and identity. What is crucial to note is that Borges, at this particular time of writing, does not make these links consciously, and so the dualities and thus the tensions remain irreconcilable between time and eternity, and also between the individuated self and the self which is in communion with a higher self. These tensions could be resolved by a mystical union which Borges does not experience, a longing which he does, however, express both intellectually and emotionally. The notion of timelessness has for Borges a personal, intuitive certainty

which goes beyond the rational, and which transcends the absence for Borges of this experience not lived. The texts of this period in his life, notably 'Historia de la eternidad' and 'El acercamiento a Almotásim' reveal an intuition of, an empathy with the Divine, though not experienced nor explicitly acknowledged. These texts also speak of his longing to transcend time, of his desire for spiritual fulfilment, and the frustration at the lack of it.

The 1940s can be seen as a period of great tension for Borges between mysticism and pantheism, between faith and resignation. It is also the time when he branches out towards the notion of eternity as an alternative to the nothingness of time and individuated identity. And so, in 1943, Borges picks up his discussion of the Eternal Return, which he had first embarked on a decade earlier ('La doctrina de los ciclos'). It is in the later essay on cyclical time, 'El tiempo circular', that he formulates his own, preferred version of the Eternal Return: perpetual recurrence not of the same but of the similar. I will argue that this accounts for the Borgesian theme of the version - textual versions, but also versions of personal destinies, lives, pasts, and deaths - which pervades so much of his work. It is at this stage that Borges introduces the German mystics Angelus Silesius and Daniel von Czepko into his writing, in which the interplay, but also the tensions between immanence and transcendence, between pantheism and mysticism become discernible. In 1944/46, with 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, A/B', Borges formulates what appears to be a confluence of the Eternal Return and the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. In the 1946 edition of 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, B', Borges brings together those philosophers who had shaped his understanding of notions of time and of selfhood, from whom he, however, also departed the most radically. He has an intimation of transcendence, only to resign himself to forever being a prisoner of his own consciousness, of time, and most poignantly, of his own self:

And yet, and yet ... Negar la sucesión temporal, negar el yo, negar el universo astronómico, son desesperaciones aparentes y consuelos secretos. [...] El tiempo es la substancia de que estoy hecho. [...] El mundo, desgraciadamente, es real; yo, desgraciadamente, soy Borges.

(*'Nueva refutación del tiempo B'*)

It is after this desperate resignation to the inescapability of his own being, which concludes 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', that Borges, six years later in a new 'Nota al prólogo' to the re-edition of the text in 1952, introduces the Buddhist tale of King Milinda (Menandro). Again, Borges makes an almost desperate, intellectual attempt at offering himself alternatives to the nothingness, and at the same time the inescapability, of his own being. And finally, in the 1953 prologue to a re-edition of 'Historia de la eternidad' (first published in 1936), Borges comes to embrace Platonic Forms, a view which marks a radical change of attitude from that displayed at the time of originally writing in 1936. Borges' statement of 1953 can be seen as a tentative conclusion to his ongoing postulation and refutation of time, selfhood, and to his quest for a union of the self with the Divine. The **early 1950s** are thus a time when Borges can be seen to revisit some of the major claims of previous decades.

To recapitulate: In the early essays of the 1920s Borges argues and engages with the issues of reality, time and identity rather one-dimensionally; he argues solely for their denial, whereby the non-existence (or unattainability) of these concepts is already pre-established in his mind². Later in his essayistic work he is to differentiate between the various aspects of these concepts. Thus, in the texts of the 1930s - a time that can be seen as a crux in his life, whereupon his vision on time changes - he re-introduces the concept of time by way of discussing time as infinite, cyclical, or eternal. In the 1940s he finally seems to come full circle: he arrives back at his initial denial; and yet, denial now bears the tones of resignation. The introduction of mystical texts from Buddhist, Sufi, and Christian spiritual traditions in the mid-1940s to early 1950s are evidence of a progression in Borges' ever-deepening spiritual search. In this move which spans three decades of his writing, Borges' refutations, postulations and variations of any one philosopher's concepts can be seen as a 'confluence' of ideas (Gérard Genette³ 1970, 104), never fixed, never final, always fluid and always susceptible of further alterations.

² After their initial publication, these texts were, following Borges' own instructions, not to be re-published. Re-publication only occurred after his death. Although disavowed by Borges, these early essays are crucial for this analysis as they establish concerns which can be shown to remain with Borges despite his later discarding of certain youthful approaches.

³ With respect to the relation between any one piece of literature to another.

On the one hand, Borges does move ever more towards an apprehension of, or longing for eternity, which can be equated with the Divine and which is, on a deeper level still, an expression of his desire to make complete, to heal his fragmented or non-existent sense of self. Eternity thus stands for plenitude, and also for a complete sense of self, healed of its singularity. It has therefore the potential to offer a mystical release from individuation and temporality. But Borges does not conceive of eternity as a divine attribute, an omission which has far-reaching consequences for both his characters' and Borges' own quest.

The Divine in the Work of Borges

In his stories, Borges projects onto his characters, male and female, the absences posed by his ultimately unresolved speculations. In view of the textual evidence, both from his essays, his stories, and latterly from his poems also, certain much quoted declarations by Borges (which will be analysed more closely later in this Introduction) as to the purely aesthetic, intellectual, narratorial and inspirational value of philosophical and theological doctrines, may have to be reconsidered, and the role of the Divine assigned a more prominent place than accorded by the canon of critics, and not least, as is often held, by Borges himself. His remarks, typically understated and subtle, as to the significance of theologies and philosophies have been taken as categorical dismissals of these influences, or as admitting to an agnostic outlook. This is a view which is highly contestable. Far from solely driving the story or supplying intriguing, inspirational or outlandish backdrops to the events narrated, the desire for a union with the Absolute, a higher order is not only what underlies and drives the story, it also compels Borges in what will be revealed to be his textual passions and obsessions.

Whereas the notion of the Divine can be traced chronologically in Borges' essayistic writing, his fictional work can be seen to develop in a less obviously chronological way. Through the stories, Borges engages in a process of oscillation, both within individual stories, and amongst various stories, or texts. These texts are torn between the absence of and the desire for an underlying, absolute reality; between union with the Divine and the failure to find a spiritual reality; between the

absence of an underlying Godhead, and the union of the self with God; between the nullification of the self and its affirmation in the Absolute; between time and eternity. And so Borges' *ficciones* are not about character, nor are they about motif, cause or effect; they are about an event, a miracle, leading towards a higher, namely spiritual dimension. This spiritual dimension might manifest itself as a higher plane of existence; it may be called God, ultimate Reality, or the Absolute, lending stability and continuity of identity, creating cohesion between everyday existence and some more enduring, spiritual existence. The notion of a higher order is thus linked to the notions of eternity and of the Divine. It will be argued that it is Borges' omission, or exclusion of God (despite the many citations of his name), coupled with his particular fusion of monotheistic mysticism (with its emphasis on transcendence) on the one hand, and pantheism (with its emphasis on immanence) on the other, which lie at the heart of his characters' failures in the stories of both *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*. It is a stricture which is also at the heart of Borges' own striving in the essays.

The Critical Debate

In a reversal of a strong trend within academic circles which for many decades had dismissed Borges' philosophical influence, there has begun, as of around the mid-1980s a tendency to critically acclaim and analyse Borges' contributions, most notably by Juan Nuño (1986), Roberto Paoli (1992), Juan Arana (1994), and Ana Sierra (1997). Their focus has mainly been on the stories, and the essays might benefit from being given greater attention still.

This trend to give more careful, differentiated analysis to Borges' philosophical explorations is heralded in 1986 with Nuño's *La filosofía de Borges*. Until the mid-1980s, apart from few though notable exceptions such as the pioneering contribution by Ana Maria Barrenechea (1957), Louis Vax (1964), J. Agassi (1970), Erika Lorenz (1975), and Jaime Rest (1976), who all did validate the significance of Borges' writing from a philosophical point of view, the great majority of critics were quick to disclaim the value of Borges' philosophical meditations. Amongst those were

Adolfo Prieto (1954), Manuel Blanco González (1963), John Sturrock (1977), Gabriela Massuh (1980), and Arturo Echevarría (1983)⁴.

Two significant contributions in the 1970s, although little discussed by the critical canon, are those by Agassi (1970) and Lorenz (1975). In 'Philosophy as Literature: The Case of Borges', Agassi notes Borges' disagreement with the Idealists (1970, 291) and claims that Borges raises the issue of individuation from Schopenhauer's point of view rather than imparting Schopenhauer's philosophy on his reader. This differentiation is significant, as critics in general have focussed largely on Borges' proclamation of Idealism, when in fact a close analysis of his declarations reveals a very particular branch of Idealism which diverges significantly from the philosophers proclaimed by Borges himself. Borges' modification of ideas and doctrines, philosophical and spiritual, is evident only in a close analysis of how he puts forward philosophers. In most instances, he does not openly - nor, I would argue does he consciously intend to - contest them. His divergence, although in some cases explicit and deliberate, is, in other cases, unintentional and only detectable in his portrayal or paraphrasing of ideas, which reveals a very personal bias or understanding. This bias, which in crucial instances, particularly when he discusses mystical concepts, reveals a particular omission, or a certain tendency to give a particular slant to a concept with the effect of rendering it different from the originally intended. These omissions, personal propensities, and slippages will be the object of discussion of Chapters II to V in particular.

Lorenz's 'Literatura fantástica y metafísica: Consideraciones sobre Jorge Luis Borges y Arthur Schopenhauer' is an early acknowledgement of Schopenhauer's philosophy in Borges' writing. She stresses the link between the concepts of time and identity in his work, but it is her view, shared by a great many critics up to the mid 1980s, that Borges uses philosophical ideas mainly for narratorial reasons. However, like Juan Nuño is to do in 1986 in more depth, Lorenz validates and discusses those philosophical ideas rather than treating them as mere catalysts or loops for his fictions.

⁴ Quoted in Arana (1994, 17). For further excellent bibliographical references see also Nuño (1986).

If one examines the debate around the philosophical significance of Borges' work which ensued post-1970s, a list of significant contributions towards the positively evaluative, analytical, philosophical focus of Borges' work emerges: Juan Nuño (1986), Serge Champeau (1990), Diva Gomes (1991), Roberto Paoli (1992), Greg Kaminsky (1994), Juan Arana (1994), Ana Sierra (1997). Of all these, Nuño's work may be considered a hallmark. It emphasizes Borges' innovative, narratorial contributions to literature which, Nuño claims, although rooted in philosophy, are nonetheless undisputably narratives. He asserts that Borges' true strength lies in 'la creación de estructuras narrativas a partir de ideas filosóficas' (1986, 15). Nuño's book heralds a significant shift away from that critical vein, prevalent particularly from the 1950s through to the 1980s, a period when critics judged Borges' philosophical debt as arrogance or as displays of intellectual game playing and superiority, or as purely instrumental to his narratives. This is a view which Borges himself seems to have lent great weight to in his much quoted statement in the epilogue to *Otras Inquisiciones*. Borges confesses to an underlying scepticism to his belief system when he says, in 1952:

Dos tendencias he descubierto, al corregir las pruebas [...]. Una, a estimar las ideas religiosas o filosóficas por su valor estético y aun por lo que encierran de singular y de maravilloso. Esto es, quizá, indicio de un escepticismo esencial.
(Epílogo, *Otras Inquisiciones*, p.192).

In 1973, in an interview with María Esther Vázquez Borges is quoted as stating:

No profeso ningún sistema filosófico, salvo, aquí podría coincidir con Chesterton, el sistema de la perplejidad [...]. Yo no tengo ninguna teoría del mundo.⁵

And in a radio interview with A. Carrizo in 1979 Borges declares:

A mí no se me ha ocurrido nada. Se me han ocurrido fábulas con temas filosóficos, pero no ideas filosóficas. Yo soy incapaz de pensamiento filosófico.⁶

From his statement of 1952 in *Otras Inquisiciones*, we may conclude that religious and spiritual ideas held no truth for Borges other than being of narratorial and inspirational use. But despite its many citations, the second half of the 1952 declaration, on Borges' scepticism, remains largely uncommented. And yet, it is this

⁵ Quoted in Nuño (1986, 11-12).

⁶ Quoted in Nuño (1986, 11-12).

very scepticism which can be seen as very much linked to the pursuit of knowledge. It is curiosity which lies at the heart of investigating the great metaphysical questions of the how, why and who of our existence. But knowledge is tied to causality (the why and how of things), and also to time and space (the when and where), all three of which, when analysed with philosophical rigour, are prone to lead one to doubt, rather than answer, the underlying purpose of the things in themselves⁷. It so seemed to have happened to Borges: his intellectual probings into the big metaphysical questions led him, at best, to *perplejidad* (in itself the result of a searching mind), and at worst, to doubt and resignation into the nothingness of all that is deemed essential. Arana comments on Borges' increasing resignation into the unknowability of the nature of the world, hinting thus at the chronology, the evolution of Borges' thinking (1994, 29): '¿Son vanos, entonces, los esfuerzos del hombre para conocer? Así lo indica Borges muchas veces. [...] El desaliento de Borges se acentúa con los años.'

It can be argued that Borges' scepticism is a confluence of religious, philosophical, and global doubt. At the heart of religious scepticism, which had affected Hume, Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche alike - all of whom much referred-to by Borges - is the notion of causality, that is of referring the effect to a superior cause:

[In the post-Newtonian age] it was no longer necessary to claim that the cause must manifest a higher level of being than its effect, e.g that the origin of mind and intelligence must itself be intelligent [...]. [It became harder] to superimpose a benign teleology upon nature to see the working there of a divine hand.⁸

Philosophical scepticism, on the other hand, 'questions our cognitive achievements, challenging our ability to obtain reliable knowledge.' And global scepticism 'casts doubt upon all our attempts to seek the truth'.⁹ Nuño holds that despite Borges' preoccupation with Idealism and his all-encompassing scepticism, which might easily have created a disjointed narrative worldview, Borges' world is instead kept together, as it were, by his holding on to the notion of memory. Nuño goes as far as to propose that the very act of remembering constitutes for Borges his main

⁷ See also Arana (1994, 71 and 77).

⁸ Honderich, T., ed., 1995. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford: OUP, 766.

⁹ *Ibid*, 794-798.

ontological security, the proof of his own existence. Yet, the question of identity, of being or not being the same, remains open (1986, 138-139):

La inspiración metafísica de Borges, alimentada por ese idealismo de los instantes y las fugacidades [¹⁰], bien pudiera haber dado una visión discontinua y rota del mundo creativo borgiano, lo que no es ciertamente el caso. La recuperación de una seguridad filosófica, de un centro de operaciones cognitivas y, por supuesto, narrativas, tiene mucho que ver con la obsesión de Borges por la memoria, única garantía de la identidad del yo. Si Borges hubiera sido un filósofo a la moda cartesiana, su contrapunto al francés, padre del *cogito*, habría sido, en todo momento: Recuerdo, luego existo. La memoria salva no tanto porque recupera cuanto porque mantiene; aunque siempre quedará abierta esa duda por la que se cuele la fisura de otro: ser o no ser el mismo.

Nuño's view may well be confirmed when proceeding from his fictions, however, it cannot be confirmed from a reading of Borges' early essays, where he categorically denies that the seat of identity, of the self, should be found in memory:

Equivócase quien define la identidad personal como la posesión privativa de algún erario de recuerdos. ('La nadería de la personalidad', 1922, 94)

Nuño (1986, 138-139) identifies time as the arch enemy of man as a whole, the catalyst for doubt and scepticism, the victor also over Borges himself¹¹:

La duda, la desazón, el desgaste provienen del viejo y arquetípico enemigo: el tiempo como forma de existir que sólo el hombre conoce. Por eso la gran batalla metafísica de Borges, en prosa y en verso, [...] contra el tiempo, resignado a dejarse arrastrar por él.

In Nuño's, view, Borges 'translates' philosophy into fiction, and in so doing avoids using philosophical terms; instead, he praises Borges for inventing new narrative means to serve his 'translation'. Nuño insists that in order to fully appreciate Borges one need not, indeed one must not limit oneself to a purely philosophical reading (1986, 138-139):

Entre mentalismo y temporalidad se contiene el arco apretado de recursos metafísicos de Borges: los mundos posibles, las paradojas como grietas de irracionalidad, los espejos abominables por multiplicadores de las fugaces copias. Pero lo mejor es que para lograr la expresión de esas abstractas nociones, Borges levanta la imagería de sus poderosos símbolos literarios. Dicho así, con términos del trillado vocabulario filosófico, no pasaría de ser un inane corolario de media docena de viejas ideas metafísicas. Lo bueno es que jamás Borges lo dice así: lo dice en y a través de sus relatos y ensayos, con el suficiente vigor literario como para cobrar vida propia y poder existir en tanto obras de creación artística, sin ninguna necesidad del apoyo interpretativo metafísico.

¹⁰ What he also calls Borges' 'presentismo' (1986, 132).

¹¹ From within a Christian framework of argument, time is perceived of as created by God, and as such contained within the Divine, within eternity. Thus there is no tension, only distinction.

Like Nuño, Roberto Paoli in 'Borges y Schopenhauer' (1992) identifies the various philosophical strands which constitute Borges' worldview: the devaluation of the world of appearances to illusions or dreams can be traced back to Heraclitus, Plato, Spinoza, Kant, and Indian mythology alike. Neoplatonism and Gnosticism account for the deficient and abominable aspect which Borges perceives in the deceptive nature of reality (1992, 180). Paoli vindicates Buddhism as another, central focus for Borges' worldview and as the origin for the idea of emptiness as underlying the universe. The notion of the world as an empty mirror goes back to Plotinus. Paoli (p.183) feels that Borges' adherence to Idealism is primarily shaped by Schopenhauer and encompasses all of his precursors (Plato, Plotinus, the Gnostics, Scoto Erigena, Spinoza, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant), whereas he holds that Borges' denial of the self is more akin to the phenomenalism of Hume, favoured by Borges for its radicality and kinship to Buddhism (p.183). Yet, despite these assertions by Paoli, it will be argued in the course of Chapter I that Borges, despite his countless references to Schopenhauer's Idealism, does really anything but conform with all of Schopenhauer's doctrine.

Paoli also connects Borges' Idealism and his view of history. By the same token which affects the world as a dream, history is infected, and here, too, Paoli (1992,183) detects an echo of Schopenhauer's view (as expounded in *Parerga and Paralipomena*). It is the disparaging views of history as illusory, repetitive (or worse still: unchanging) which can be seen to be at the heart of Borges' rejection of historicism and his belief in the contemporary and at once eternal nature of all things, a belief which Borges shares with Hindu philosophy.

Another contribution is Paoli's emphasis on and his analysis of the German language, culture, and philosophy in Borges' life and work. Paoli also acquaints the reader with the notions of individuation and identification; discusses questions of identity; the debate concerning the species vs the individual, Borges' attitude towards death, and his theological outlook. But most importantly, he asserts the more than decorative use of Schopenhauer's philosophy in the writings of Borges and acknowledges that Schopenhauer's philosophy significantly shapes and bears upon the world which Borges creates. Paoli focusses on two of Schopenhauer's maxims: 1. that

what we commonly perceive as chance is really necessity or causality; and 2. that the Will, as opposed to the free will, operates in both our successes and failures. Paoli poses the question whether Borges actually does believe in Schopenhauer's philosophy which states that time multiplies that which is essentially one, or whether it serves him a merely literary purpose, an idea to be exploited literarily (1992, 201):

A Borges le parece una imagen asombrosa la que brinda la filosofía de Schopenhauer, cuando afirma que el mundo no es tal como aparece y que el tiempo y el espacio multiplican y varían ante nuestros ojos alucinados lo que en la esencia es uno y lo mismo: es muy probable que Borges también crea que el mundo es así, pero más cierto es que él ha hallado en esta idea del mundo una imagen explotable literariamente al infinito.

Arana, too, validates the philosophical inspirations in the works of Borges. In *El centro del laberinto: Los motivos filosóficos en la obra de Borges* (1994), Arana analyses Borges' philosophical preoccupations and treats them homogeneously in the sense that he deliberately chose to leave out considerations of biography, context, chronology or evolution of thought (1994,16). However, it is the very investigation and analysis into the evolution and progression in Borges' thought which is a very promising step in furthering the reader's understanding of Borges' texts. It may also allow the reader to glean some of Borges' worldview, both from a literary and also a personal angle.

One of the latest substantial works on the philosophical debt in Borges is Ana Sierra's *El mundo como voluntad y representación: Borges y Schopenhauer* (1997). Sierra identifies and correlates the significance of Schopenhauer as a precursor and inspiration in Borges' work, and she records and discusses the narrative manifestations in Borges' stories. Sierra gives an excellent overview of Schopenhauer's philosophy, focussing her discussion on the notion of will and representation, on perception, causality, and Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory with its correlates: the resolution of time, space, and individuation; and, in the wake of these resolutions, the ability to apprehend the Idea (1997, ix-x).

Despite these positive evaluations of the philosophical strands in Borges' work, there is only one critic who goes so far as to identify a Borgesian philosophy as such. Arana insists on asking what is to him the crucial question: '¿Hay

en Borges una filosofía?', to which he answers: 'Sí, creo que hay en Borges una filosofía, como en todos los hombres lúcidos y curiosos' (both 1994, 19). Arana thus seems undeterred by the various claims made by Borges himself as to his total non-contribution to philosophical thought. Although it could be argued that in his statement, Arana may be changing the meaning of the word 'philosophy' from its usual, more rarified sense to mean that any intelligent person has a basic outlook on the world which informs all of their views on more specific questions. Against Arana's assertion that there is indeed a philosophy in Borges' work, be that philosophy a more formal, or a more personal matter of opinion and exploration, the following warning by Nuño against a purely philosophical and thus limiting reading of Borges can be juxtaposed (1996, 12-13):

Sería además de falso, pedante e innecesariamente recargado empeñarse en rastrear ideas filosóficas en toda la obra de Borges. [...] Que en Borges haya ciertos y determinados temas filosóficos no deberá nunca entenderse como que su propósito fue hacer filosofía y menos aún que su obra entera resuma o contiene claves metafísicas que sólo esperan por su despertar. [...] Jamás una lectura filosófica de Borges, por acertada o inteligente que sea, podrá sustituir la verdadera lectura, que es aquella que permite disfrutar de todo el esplendor de su expresión literaria y toda la fuerza de su riqueza imaginativa [...].

It can be argued that what Nuño calls the *apoyo metafísico* which he feels is redundant in examining and in enjoying Borges' work¹², is, as I would argue, a worthwhile instrument indeed, elucidating and indispensable when examining the progression in Borges' thinking, both from a personal-biographical, and also a literary point of view. Borges' creative appropriation of philosophical and theological ideas is a sign of a conviction - as evidenced also in some of his most famous *ficciones* - that neither authorship, nor indeed the original text or idea, are sacrosanct. One might also say that his transformation of philosophical ideas is also, apart from being a conviction, the sign of a searching mind which cannot find solace in any of the conclusive answers which its intellect arrives at so painstakingly. For philosophy and spiritual notions can be shown to have been immensely relevant to Borges' work. Borges is a 'reader of ideas' in the Barthesian sense that 'a text [in the case of Borges: a concept] is a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (1977, 147)¹³. More so, the sheer perseverance over many decades and

¹² Although it should be remembered that Nuño refers mainly to Borges' stories.

¹³ For a debate on transtextuality and texts existing only in relation to other texts, see also Saussure in linguistics, and Bakhtin in literature.

the unrelenting will to engage, debate, and argue with or against thinkers and their doctrines in his essays is ample proof of Borges' seriousness in the matter. Borges' engagement with doctrines is in both manifest and hidden relation to his texts (manifest in his essays, hidden in his stories)¹⁴. It deserves a great deal more than cursory attention. To ignore these philosophical and theological dimensions would mean to deny Borges' texts an integral amplitude which attests to his thinking, his preoccupations, his textual passions and obsessions.

¹⁴ It is an extension to the realm of abstract ideas of what Genette (*Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* 1982) had termed 'transtextuality' with reference to the text: anything that is in manifest or hidden relation to other texts or ideas, irrespective of chronology, contemporariness or causality.

Part One: The Essays

The Nothingness of Self and of God

Borges' earliest arguments for Idealism are based on, yet also deviate significantly from Berkeley and Schopenhauer. The belief that the world is but a dream, a man-made, mental construct where the notions of time, space, and selfhood hold does not mean that appearances, i.e. that which constitutes our empirical world, are mere hallucinations. Both Kant and Schopenhauer insist that appearances are not hallucinations, and that as such they can be experienced; they are the necessary rules of our empirical world: time, space, individuation and the self are real in the sense that they are what we have access to, what we experience, unlike the things or the world as it is in itself, which lies beyond experience (see Janaway 1997, 232-234).

In his philosophical analysis, Arana traces the thought of Berkeley and Schopenhauer within Borges' work and includes Borges' own conception of the world (1994, 39):

Esse est percipi, dijo Berkeley; *el mundo es voluntad y representación*, afirmó Schopenhauer; *más bien y ante todo es sueño*, matiza Borges. [Arana concludes:] Lo propio del sueño es la falsedad. Si el mundo, el universo, la realidad son sueños, la ficción y el engaño constituyen su íntima esencia.

and Sierra (1997, 9 and 12) says on Schopenhauer's notion of the oneric nature of the empirical world, which, though dream, is nonetheless real, a view shared by Kant:

La filosofía de Schopenhauer también tiene en común con la literatura el tema de la distinción entre sueño y realidad. [...] Se sostiene que el espacio, el tiempo y la causalidad, son pre-condiciones necesarias para que el sujeto pueda representarse los objetos. Por ello, Schopenhauer afirma que entre el sujeto y los objetos se interpone una especie de velo [Mâyâ] que no permite percibir claramente la realidad, por lo que los objetos aparecen como se representarían en un sueño.

A pesar de que la realidad fenoménica puede ser percibida como sueño, Schopenhauer no afirma que sea ilusoria. [...] Insiste en que el mundo empírico es real, aunque se trate solo de una existencia basada en la representación, y como tal, condicionada por la percepción de un sujeto. [Sierra quotes from the English translation of Schopenhauer:] The whole world of objects is and remains representation, and is for this reason wholly and forever conditioned by the subject; in other words, it has transcended ideality. But it is not, on that account, falsehood or illusion.

Despite the onerous nature of the world, the dream is not to be mistaken for illusion, or irreality. And here, as closer analysis of Borges' early essays shall reveal, lies the crux of what can be termed the philosophy of Borges.

In the early 1920s, there is in Borges' work, as yet, no differentiation of the terms and the notions of time and of identity; there is only denial. Borges holds that the world is a dream or illusion, with no dreamer to it. He accepts the mind-dependency of the world of appearances or perceptions but, in almost solipsistic fashion, denies it not only any underlying reality, but also denies the reality of the dream itself. It is interesting that Borges, when arguing his concept of non-causality in 'El cielo azul, es cielo y es azul', should have recourse to Lichtenberg's famous suggestion that we should say 'It thinks' rather than 'I think', as this very assertion by Lichtenberg has always found favour with solipsists¹.

'El cielo azul, es cielo y es azul' (from now referred to as 'El cielo azul') of 1922 is a very brief text in which Borges sketches and encapsulates all of the concerns which he is to take up and develop and explicate in the slightly later essays 'La nadería de la personalidad' (referred to as 'La nadería') of 1923 and 'La encrucijada de Berkeley' (referred to as 'La encrucijada') of 1925. In 'El cielo azul', Borges questions the nature of reality and wonders how to determine conclusively the 'reality' (the one and only) of any one perceived thing. He resorts to various doctrines, mainly materialism and (Schopenhauer's) idealism, in order to establish the difference between appearance and reality. Schopenhauer's will, he says, is what underlies the phenomenal reality; but Borges cites other philosophers and their theories as to what underlies the world of appearances (the phenomenal world), such as the Platonic Idea, the Kantian thing in itself, etc.

Having established the underlying fault of all of these doctrines (that fault being the adherence to the notion of causality), Borges then proposes his own doctrine of non-causality, claiming (like Hume) that there is no causal link between matter and mind, between object and subject, but a merely relational one. Borges also formulates his view on language as a player in these issues when he introduces one of his

¹ For further explication see Honderich 1995, 838.

recurring convictions: that it is the intellect, not language, which, rather than elucidating the searching mind, misleads it. Borges argues that language, although inept at arguing non-causality, is not to be blamed for causality itself; this is against received opinion which holds that language, with its successive and linear structure is one of the grounds on which the notion of causality is founded.

In this early essay, Borges explores the question of perception and reality and defames materialism, professing himself an advocate of Schopenhauer's Idealism². Borges introduces the subject by posing the question: how do we determine which is the 'real' landscape which changes before our very eyes? In 'La encrucijada' (1925) Borges asks the same question again in relation to the figtree. He argues that if it is sensory impressions which govern our perception of a (version of a) given thing - the landscape or the tree in Borges' particular example - then how, when these impressions change, as they would in different circumstances of light, etc., would we decide which of the versions was the real one? How could we determine which qualities were essential and which were non-essential?

Borges asks: what are essential qualities anyway? which are the qualities which identify the landscape or the figtree as an individual in its own right? and which are non-essential qualities which, as such, are subject to change? In answer to this, Borges first resorts to the materialist's explanation. The materialist denies the reality of sensory perceptions, which s/he situates somewhere between matter and spirit ('La encrucijada', p.119). The materialist postulates that the essence of the world is the atom. *Substantividad* is constituted by extension. For a materialist, reality is physical extension, is matter; thus physical extension assumes the hallmark of existence. To which Borges retorts: but the atom, which in itself is not perceptible sensually, nonetheless generates matter, which is indeed perceptible via the senses. This, he says, makes a mockery of the materialist's attempt to denounce the reality of sensory perception, when, at the same stroke, it is sensory perceptions which the materialist uses to seemingly prove the reality of matter.

² For a succinct analysis of Schopenhauer see Sierra 1997, Chapter 1.

Borges decries the materialist's postulation of two universes, one essential and made of essential qualities, and the other phenomenal and made up of non-essential qualities ('El cielo azul', p.155). And Borges abhors multiplication. This is why he is so opposed to materialism: it adds one reality to another. Nuño (1986, 38) states that for Plato, the dream (as well as sexual intercourse) are instances where man proves the unbridled multiplicity of the material world. Translated into Borgesian terms: in the dream, one reality (that of the dream, that of the phenomenal world) is being referred to another (that of the waking state, the inaccessible, absolute reality) and thus horribly and unnecessarily multiplied. Borges favours the Idealist notion of perception as mind-dependent. In favour of Idealism Borges says:

Escuchemos al idealismo entonces. Schopenhauer, el mediador que con más feliz perspicacia y más plausibles abundancias de ingenios, ha promulgado esta doctrina, quiere dilucidar el mundo mediante las dos claves de la representación y la voluntad. ('El cielo azul', p.155)

Let us briefly delineate those aspects of Schopenhauer's philosophy which are of instrumental significance to an analysis of these early essays of the 1920s. Christopher Janaway (1997) in his excellent study on the philosophy of Schopenhauer traces Schopenhauer's debt to and inspiration in Kant's and Berkeley's Idealism, as well as in Plato's Archetypes. One of Schopenhauer's great feats was the fusion of two essentially distinct notions: the fusion of Kant's thing in itself with Plato's Idea. Schopenhauer came to conclude that the Kantian thing in itself (albeit unknowable, inaccessible and never to be experienced) and the Platonic Idea (very knowable) were one and the same (Janaway 1997, 235 and 245-246):

Even though the Kantian thing in itself was supposed to be beyond the limit of human knowledge, while Plato's Ideas were the objects of knowledge *par excellence*, Schopenhauer conflated what the two were saying, and formed a Platonic view about what an insight into the thing in itself beyond appearance would be like.

Schopenhauer [...] begins by expounding an idealist position. This is the view that the material objects which we experience [matter] depend for their order and their existence on the knowing subject [mind]. [...] [Kant had explained] how what is perceived constitutes a world of objects when it is governed by the necessary rules space, time and causality. Schopenhauer's account of the world of empirical things is [...]: empirical things consist of matter, which fills distinct portions of space and time, and which is in causal interaction with other such portions. But his idealism says that without the subject of experience, all such objects would not exist. To be more specific: it is *individual* things that would not exist without the experiencing subject. What we experience in the ordinary course of our lives are distinct things [individuation]. One table is an individual distinct from another, one animal or person likewise. But what is the principle on which this division of the world into individual

things works? Schopenhauer has a very clear and plausible answer: location in space and time. Now if you take this view, and also think, with Kant, that the organizing of things under the structure of space and time stems from the subject [i.e. the perceiving mind], and applies only to the world of phenomena, not to the world as it is in itself, then you will conclude that individuals do not exist in the world as it is in itself. The world would not be broken up into individual things, if it were not for the space and time which we, as subjects, impose. Here then are two important tenets of Schopenhauer's philosophy: Space and time are the principle of individuation [...] and there can be no individuals on the 'in itself' side of the line.

This view echoes the Hindu notion of the oneness of all there is. None of the relationships between subject and object, between time, space and causality 'applies beyond the phenomena out of which our experience is composed', i.e.: none of it applies in the world considered as the thing in itself (the essential, underlying Reality to our world of phenomena or representation). The nature of the underlying reality, of that which lay beyond 'all these subject-imposed modes of connection' is as follows: 'The thing in itself [for Schopenhauer: the will] was a hidden essence working away underneath the order we imposed on the objects of our experience' (Janaway 1997, 243).

So, there is something else besides the world of representation (this representational world being the 'way things present themselves to us in experience': there is the other side of the world, which is the Will, which in turn is 'the world in itself, beyond the mere appearances to which human knowledge is limited' (Janaway 1997, 226). Borges says in 'El cielo azul': there is the Will, which operates inside of us and which is a counter-force to the external influences that surround us. Although we are subject to and able to register perceptions, i.e. sensory stimuli, we can also create and manipulate them through the Will, which is inherent in all things animate and inanimate ('El cielo azul', p.156).

As has become clear: what underlies all three of the essays in question, 'El cielo azul', 'La nadería' and 'La encrucijada' is a strongly anti-materialist and pro-Idealist position. Borges' questioning of the 'reality' or otherwise of the landscape in 'El cielo azul', and of the figtree in 'La encrucijada' echoes the debate between Locke's materialism and Berkeley's idealism, although Borges explicitly acknowledges this idealism only in the latter essay. Berkeley's particular position, and by extension Borges' too, is best understood by contrast with Locke's materialism. Berkeley's Idealism may be summarized as follows (expounded in Berkeley's *A*

Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge of 1710, quoted in Bullock and Trombley 1999, 412):

Berkeley's philosophy is perhaps the simplest version of idealism. For him the world consists of the infinite mind of God, the finite minds that he has created, and, dependently on them, the ideas possessed or experienced by these minds. For Berkeley there are no material things that exist independently of minds; common objects are collections of ideas in finite minds to the extent that they are observed by them, in the mind of God to the extent that they are not.

By contrast, Locke's materialism may be defined thus (Urmson and Rée 1989, 47):

The universe is really a mechanical system of bodies in space. It is *made*, as it were, of matter; and material bodies really possess just those qualities required for their mechanical mode of operation - 'solidity, figure, extension, motion or rest, and number'. These bodies operate on, among other things, the sense-organs of human beings, who possess minds - 'immaterial substances' - as well as bodies. When this occurs, the mechanical stimulation of these sense-organs and brain causes 'ideas' to arise in the mind, and these are the objects of which the observer is really aware. In some respects these ideas faithfully represent the actual character of the 'external world', but in others not.

It is this very Lockean notion of an external world, somehow and to some extent representative of our mental ideas, which Berkeley challenges. For, he argues, 'how could an observer, who was aware of nothing but his own ideas, know anything about Locke's "external world"?' (Urmson and Rée 1989, 47). With this brief analysis in mind, we can now come to understand Borges' assertion against materialism in 'El cielo azul':

Oigamos a los materialistas ahora. [...] Aberración es ésta [explicación]. [...] El materialismo, en suma, no explica nada, y el concepto de dos universos paralelos y coexistentes, uno esencial, continuo, colectivo [Locke's 'external world'], y el otro fenomenal, intermitente, psicológico [Locke's 'ideas'], es antes una complicación que una ayuda. Si lo aceptamos, nos encaran dos problemas en lugar de uno.

(*'El cielo azul'*, p.155)

Here, Borges takes particular exception to the notion of multiple universes, multiple realities; an early statement of his later, more fervently expressed aversions to anything that smacks of multiplication, duplication, proliferation, such as occurs in mirrors. Like Schopenhauer, who had felt that 'realism - the alternative to idealism - saddles itself with two 'worlds', one of which is redundant' (Janaway 1997, 247). Borges then goes on to scorn the distinction (Lockean in essence) between essential, objective qualities on the one hand, and subjective ones on the other, such as smell, sound, and

colour which, as Locke holds, are qualities that have no 'outside' reality ('El cielo azul', p.155, and 'La encrucijada' p.118). In order to eliminate both the intellectual absurdities and the aesthetic repulsion which he felt pervaded Locke's position, Berkeley came up with a solution to all these horrors. All he had to do was to deny the existence of Matter.

Up to this point, Borges agrees with Berkeley's non-material universe, and on the denial of existence outside of the perceiving mind. But Berkeley, apart from holding intellectual and aesthetic objections to Locke's materialism, also felt that Locke swerved dangerously towards atheism. It is in this next stage of Berkeley's idealism, which explores the cause of our ideas in the mind (Janaway 1997, 247), that Borges diverges most drastically from Berkeley and to which Borges dedicates a major part of his analysis in 'La encrucijada'. For it is the notion of an absolute reality, called God by Berkeley, that Borges grapples and struggles with, and ultimately argues against most vigorously, and which can be seen as lying at the heart of his scepticism.

In the earliest of the three essays, 'El cielo azul', Borges does not explicitly argue with or against Berkeley, but he still argues against the notion of an underlying reality, against a higher Reality beyond the landscape.

Let us begin by posing the obvious objection to the mind-only existence of things as ideas in our minds: surely our ideas have causes that must come to us from some independent source such as a Lockean external world. Now Berkeley uses this very notion of necessary causation in order to both refute the 'external world', and to introduce his notion of the Divine mind as the unifying force which lends cohesion to our perceptions; it is because of God, in whose mind ideas persist 'and who is always there to 'conceive' things, that they do not disappear when I turn my back on them' (Scruton 1996, 24). Berkeley's position can be stated like this (Honderich 1995, 90):

To cause is to *act*; and nothing is genuinely active but the will of an intelligent being. Locke's inanimate material bodies, therefore, could not be true causes of anything; that ideas occur in our minds as they do, with such admirable order, cohesion, and regularity, must be the will of an intelligent being [...]: God, eternal and omnipresent, omnipotent, 'in whom we live, and move and have our being', 'who works in all, and by whom all things consist'.

In 'La encrucijada' (1925) - referring and intending to strengthen the argument of 'La nadería' (1923), but also referring back to his initial position in 'El cielo azul' (1922) - Borges adopts Berkeley's theory about the mind-dependency or perception-dependency of things, but challenges Berkeley's belief in a Divine being lending coherence, reality and persistence to these things even when not perceived. The claim Borges makes of the mind-dependency of the world is thus consistent. He confirms the nullity of time, space, and the self. He denies that there is a subject (self; also God) as well as an object (the dream, our mirage existence, what we perceive as reality).

But only in the last of the three essays in question, 'La encrucijada', does he openly and explicitly challenge Berkeley's underlying reality, which is God. No longer does Borges refer to an 'underlying reality', but to God explicitly. And he also openly calls attention to Berkeley's mistake, 'la falacia raigal de Berkeley' (p.122), a mistake which he attributes to the fact that Berkeley was not only a thinker, but also a theologian and as such not quite as free a thinker as all that: Berkeley affirms that nothing exists outside the mind of an observer. He says that while things are not being perceived, they either do not exist at all (which is what Borges seems to hold) or they exist in the mind of an eternal Spirit, which Borges denies. Thus freedom of thought, for Borges, comes at a price: the realisation of the nothingness of existence, of solipsistic loneliness beyond what is mere apparition.

In his critique of Berkeley, Borges does more than object to the notion of a God who is at the heart of, and sustains, the phenomenal world. What Borges seems to object to is the very nature of Berkeley's God: he sees God devalued, diminished as it were, to a mere adjunction of God as a kind of glue, a plaster which serves to lend cohesion to the otherwise disparate sensory perceptions. Borges laments that thus God is not even a Creator, but merely serves to stop the world from emerging and submerging from existence depending on the whim of the individual beholder. Borges gives the impression of missing the notion of an omnipotent, omnipresent God; he seems to miss the notion that God is indeed the creator:

[For Berkeley,] Dios no es hacedor de las cosas; es más bien un meditador de la vida o un inmortal y ubicuo espectador del vivir. Su eterna vigilancia impide que el universo se aniquile y resurja a capricho de atenciones individuales, y además presta firmeza y grave prestigio a todo el sistema.

(‘La encrucijada’, p.122)

Borges’ objection is that since things do not really have an existence in themselves, they only figuratively speaking come and go into existence through the mind of the beholder. Thus, sadly so, there is no necessity, not even a logical necessity, for Berkeley’s God:

Olvida Berkeley que una vez igualados la cognición y el ser, las cosas en cuanto existencias autónomas cesan de hecho y sólo traslaticiamamente cabe decir que se aniquilan y resurgen.

(‘La encrucijada’, p.122)

Borges sets out to prove Berkeley’s fallacy: he will do so by applying Berkeley’s reasoning to the spirit which Berkeley himself had applied to matter (p. 122). Berkeley says that things only exist for as long as they are being perceived by a mind, to which Borges replies: yes, but the mind only exists in as much as it perceives and thinks of things. The implication is: since the thing has no reality outside the mind, and the mind only exists as perceiver of that which is unreal, the mind or spirit itself has no reality (‘La encrucijada’, p.123). And thus Borges can claim that the existence of a mind does not entail a self or a Divinity lending coherence or persistence:

Sí, pero sólo existe la mente como perceptiva y meditadora de cosas. De esta manera queda desbaratada, no sólo la unidad del mundo externo, sino la espiritual. El objeto caduca, y juntamente el sujeto. Ambos enormes sustantivos, espíritu y materia, se desvanecen a un tiempo y la vida se vuelve un enmarañado tropel de situaciones de ánimo, un ensueño sin soñador. [...] Lo que sí se vuelve humo son las grandes continuidades metafísicas: el yo, el espacio, el tiempo.

(‘La encrucijada’, p.123)

From which he concludes:

Convendréis conmigo en la absoluta nadería de esas anchurosas palabras: *Yo, Espacio, Tiempo ...*

(‘La encrucijada’, p.124)

Thus life, for Borges, turns into a muddle made up of states of mind, ‘un ensueño sin soñador’, a lie without even a liar, an object without a subject, a simulacrum without anything that may give rise to it. This is a view which is in sharp contrast to Schopenhauer’s. For Schopenhauer asserts that there can be no subject

without an object, and viceversa. Let us turn to causality and Schopenhauer's concept of subject and object. Just as Schopenhauer's world of representations is only the as it were visible layer of a construct, Representation and the Will are the dynamics and the ingredients of life according to Borges' rendering of Schopenhauer; but Borges also gives his reader other philosopher's explanations of what underlies the world of appearances: that of Pythagoras, whose world is built on numerical principles; Plato's notion of the existence of universal Ideas which are being copied in this world and whose memory resides in us, allowing us to recognize and place sensory perceptions; the Cabbala which proposes the notion that we are all just emanations of a God whom we long to be united with once again; etc. The reason why Borges resorts to other doctrines is, I would argue, in order to prepare the ground for his own, ensuing refutation of causality. Causation is the concept which states and explores 'the relation between two items, one of which is a cause of the other' (Honderich 1995, 126). It could be said that causality points backwards to the cause, whereas teleology points forward to the purpose, the end³.

What really is at the heart of hearts of Borges' debate is his objection to and denial of the principle of causality, a principle which, in turn, is linked to the notion of time. Borges' debate around Idealism gravitates towards his objection to the concept of causality, and as causality is intimately linked to the relationship between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, the discussion and denial of causality leads Borges to the denial of the self and of personal identity, and also of time. Let us examine Schopenhauer's understanding on causality and the relationship to subject and object. Schopenhauer holds that there can be no subject (mind) without the object (matter) and viceversa. It is important to remember that Schopenhauer makes a case for causality in the phenomenal world because, as an analysis of Borges' essays reveals, this is one of the main points of divergence between Schopenhauer's and Borges' philosophies. Translated into Borges' example of the landscape: for Schopenhauer, there could, in Borges' example, be no landscape (object) without a perceiver (subject), nor could there be a *yo* (subject) without something (object) 'que

³ Says Scruton (1996, 173-174):

A teleological explanation explains an event in terms of its end (i.e. the in terms of something that comes afterwards). A 'causal' explanation, as now understood, explains an event in terms of events that produce (and therefore precede) it.

ocupe el campo de mi consciencia' ('El cielo azul', p.156). For Schopenhauer, there exists a mutually necessitating, mutually inclusive relation between the subject and the object, between the self which perceives and the object of its contemplation. For Hume, on the other hand, there was no such causal link, only a purely relational one. Schopenhauer's conception of causality is one of the main tenets of his philosophy, as causality is one of the necessary principles of the phenomenal world. Causality is for Schopenhauer as necessary a principle as is the notion of a perceiving subject and a perceived object, a concept which he shares with Kant and the Upanishadic writings (Janaway 1997, 248-249). Schopenhauer's view of causality is thus subject-centred and subject-dependent, and although being mind-dependent, subject and object are mutually necessitating, mutually inclusive (Janaway 1997, 248-249):

[One of Schopenhauer's main arguments for Idealism] rests on the concepts of *subject* and *object*. The subject is that which knows or experiences, the object that which is known or experienced. The world of representation, for Schopenhauer, requires both. He makes two large claims: first, that nothing can be both object and subject [the self cannot know itself], secondly that there can never be a subject without an object, or an object without a subject. It is the last point which he takes to establish idealism [...]. Nothing can be an object for experience without there being a subject to experience it or think about it. [...] whatever we can experience must exist only in relation to our experiencing it.

Consequently, when Borges declares that life turns into 'un ensueño sin soñador', he goes against one of the groundrules of Schopenhauer's philosophy. In order to appreciate Schopenhauer's concept of causality, it is essential to know his conception of subject and object (Janaway 1997, 266):

[Schopenhauer] explains that the subject is that which knows, the object that which is known by it. [...] A subject of representation is, for Schopenhauer, a single consciousness in which many diverse experiences of objects are united. Material things and conceptual thoughts are representations for the subject. But the subject itself is the 'I' that thinks and perceives, as opposed to the things thought and the things perceived. It is vital to understand that Schopenhauer's subject of representations is not any part of the world of objects. It is not a thing at all. It is not in space or time, does not interact causally with objects, is not visible, not identified with the body, or even with the individual human being. His favourite metaphorical images for it are the eye that looks out on the world but cannot see itself [...]. The subject is where experiences all converge, but it is never itself an object of experience. [Janaway quotes from Schopenhauer:] 'We never know it, but it is precisely that which knows wherever there is knowledge'.

Borges' attitude to the subject, and by extension his attitude to the self is problematic. But before turning to Borges' version, it is vital to understand that Schopenhauer's attitude to the subject causes great confusion in itself, and that it is

essentially not without its flaws. This is due to the fact that Schopenhauer himself is ambivalent and remains unclear. Schopenhauer admitted that it was perplexing to think of oneself in the terms outlined above, and he had to resort to the notion of a miracle par excellence in order to explain 'how "I" could refer both to this pure subject [which is not to be identified with the individual human being] and to the acting, material body [the individual human being]' (Janaway 1997, 267). Janaway (1997, 269) explains the predicament in which Schopenhauer's conception of the subject places us:

The subject which we take ourselves to be is - in Schopenhauer's most extreme claim about it - merely apparent. [...] The subject that represents and the object that is represented are both, in a sense, illusory, because in the world in itself the division between subject and object does not exist.

Sierra (1997, 4) explains:

Schopenhauer niega la idea de que la realidad empirica esté compuesta de una entidad material (los objetos) y de una mental (el sujeto). Afirma, por el contrario, que sujeto y objeto son indivisibles y se limitan recíprocamente: 'For *consciousness* consists in knowing, but knowing requires a knower and a known ... Thus, just as there can be no object without a subject, so there can be no subject without an object, in other words no knower without something different from this that is known [...].

But let us remember that between the subject (mind) and the object (matter) there is *mâyâ*, veil of illusion, which renders the objects (matter) onerous in nature. Sierra continues (1997, 4):

Schopenhauer define el sujeto como una especie de yo metafísico cuya función es sostener el mundo fenoménico, pero que no puede formar parte de él, por estar fuera del tiempo, el espacio y la causalidad. La relación del sujeto con el mundo es semejante a la del ojo [sujeto] con su campo de visión [mundo], es decir, el ojo que todo lo ve no puede verse a sí mismo. Estas ideas coinciden con la de David Hume [...] quien había negado la existencia del yo, basándose en el argumento de que si se busca el sujeto percibidor en la conciencia, sólo se encuentran pensamientos, emociones, imágenes, pero no un ente que abarca todos estos objetos.

As Borges' concept of non-causality originates in Hume's view on causality, we shall now turn to Hume's famous attack on the notion of a necessitating tie between cause and effect. Hume's view, proposed in his *Treatise of Human Nature* of 1737 (cited in Honderich 1995, 128) and borne out of scepticism, is that causality is only a matter of relation (the three relations being resemblance, contiguity and causation), and that there are no necessary connections over time. Hume voices a mind-dependent, subject-centered conviction when he says that 'causal necessity is [...] something that exists in the mind, not in objects' (extract from Hume's *Treatise*, I.iii. 14,

quoted in Honderich 1995, 128). And Hume continues (quoted in Scruton 1996, 175-176):

We have no grounds for affirming that things in the world are necessarily connected. [...] Necessities merely reflect the 'relations of ideas'. [...] Necessities do not inhere in the world, but only in our ways of describing it.

Hume's law says (Scruton 1996, 175):

There are no necessary connections over time. If one thing precedes or follows another, then the connection between them is at best contingent, for it is always possible that the world should end before the second event occurs.

This is a view very much unlike Bradley's for whom nothing is contingent, not in the Absolute and not even in the world of appearances. Thus, when Hume speaks of the cement of the universe, he is referring to the building blocks of our perception of the world (Honderich 1995, 128):

Hume's description of resemblance, contiguity and causation - the three relations which induce people to associate ideas -, and hence to build up their picture of the world.

There is an echo of Hume's negation of the 'I' within consciousness when Borges denies the personal subject ('I') in the Cartesian formula *cogito ergo sum* in both his essays of 1923 and 1925, 'La nadería' and 'La encrucijada' respectively. What Borges really does is oppose the Cartesian *ergo sum*, in fact the *ergo* itself: causality:

De nada os valdría el famoso baluarte del *cogito ergo sum*. Pienso, luego soy. Si ese latín significara: *Pienso, luego existe un pensar* - única conclusión que acarrea lógicamente la premisa - su verdad sería tan incontrovertible como inútil. Empleado para significar *pienso, luego hay un pensador*, es exacto en el sentido de que toda actividad supone un sujeto y mentiroso en las ideas de individuación y continuidad que sugiere. La trampa está en el verbo ser, que según dijo Schopenhauer es meramente el nexa que junta en toda proposición el sujeto y el predicado. Pero quitad ambos términos y os queda una palabra desfondada, un sonido.

(*'La encrucijada'*, p. 124)

The famous Cartesian formula *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am, is derived from the one and only indubitable proposition which Descartes had arrived at through his doubting: that it is beyond doubt that he was doubting, i.e. that he was thinking. And from this followed the other indubitable proposition, I exist, 'for it was self-evident that nothing could think without existing' (Urmson and Rée 1989, 74), i.e. that there could be no thinking without a thinker. This is reminiscent of Borges'

introduction of Lichtenberg's (solipsistic) assertion in 'El cielo azul' that we should say 'It thinks', analogous to 'It is raining', rather than 'I think'. This amounts to an attack on Descartes' 'I' in the *cogito* and is the negation of the self as such. Borges had already, in the same essay of 1922 resorted to Lichtenberg. Borges' assertions in 'La nadería' take an even more definite shape in the above quote from 'La encrucijada': He holds that ('La encrucijada', p.124) there is only a subject, a thinking, i.e. a process, but that there does not follow from that that there is individuation nor continuity; he holds that there is no thinker (no subject) nor indeed a thought (no object). There are only the processes (the verbs) of thinking, but not a thinker nor a thought; once one removes subject and object, as Borges does, there only remains a sound without any meaning ('La encrucijada', p.124). Life is rendered a dream with no dreamer to it. Scruton explains (1996, 82):

[Lichtenberg] suggested that Descartes was entitled only to assert the existence of thought: not 'I am thinking' but 'it is thinking', to be understood on the analogy with 'it is raining'. Certainly, there is thinking going on; but why assume the existence of a thinker?

Citing Schopenhauer, Borges holds that the verb *ser* only denotes merely a relation between the subject and the object (see also Hume), and not, he asserts, existence; the verb 'to be', as Schopenhauer argues, does not denote self-existence or being, but serves only as the link between the subject and the object ('La nadería', p.124). This has grave consequences for the notion of a self. For Borges it raises the question of being vs. existence.

Borges' denial of causality, and his rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* lead us back to Schopenhauer's conception of the will as a non-teleological force⁴, a drive towards survival and reproduction, which is present in man and nature alike, and which Schopenhauer believed necessarily involved the dual evils of pain and boredom (Janaway 1997, 226-227). The will is 'the murky reality underlying the empirical world in which the individual toils and tries to understand the connections of things.' (Janaway 1997, 244). Through art, however, man could escape ordinary consciousness and also the 'murky reality of the will' into the realm of Platonic Ideas, the Platonic Idea being 'an

⁴ Although Schopenhauer thus lays himself open to the question: how can the will be blind or purposeless if it is a striving towards something, for is it then not purposeful?

exceptional vision to aspire to, of all connections undone and a brighter reality contemplated without striving and pain' (Janaway 1997, 235).

Borges' questioning of causality, as well as of teleology, is anything but a whim. It is an expression, as it has been for generations of post-Newtonian thinkers, of his grappling with truths which do no longer hold a conclusive answer. At the heart of this new scepticism is the doubting of the purposefulness of the universe⁵. Borges is not alone: The Platonic-absolutist conception of time and the nature of the universe is based on the intelligibility of the world, on the belief that language and thought (or 'word' for the Greek *logos*⁶) are accurate vehicles for recognizing and representing an intelligible reality. Language and thought being the very vehicles which Borges questions, and yet which he is forever compelled to resort to. For Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes there exist necessary truths. This reveals their conviction in the teleology of the universe: Aristotle's cosmology operates for a purpose and can be explained according to certain goals. The teleological view which supported Aristotle's Prime Mover and St Augustine's Creator, suffered great losses in the age of Newtonian mechanics which paved the way for a deterministic approach to science and to the universe: each action, each effect could be explained by way of referring it to a natural cause, and there no longer seemed to be a need for a Creator. Teleology, which received a further blow when Einstein raised the problem of the intelligibility of the universe, had finally to be abandoned altogether when Max Planck developed his quantum physics which removed all certainty from a hitherto deterministic world. Effects no longer needed causes, least of all a Creator; uncertainty, chance, and probability now reigned supreme. Borges falls very much within this period and this mode of doubting.

Let us recall that for Kant and also Schopenhauer, causality, teleology, time, space, and self are real and can be experienced, albeit only in the world of

⁵ For a definition of teleology see Honderich (1995, 868):

From the Greek word for goal, task, completion, or perfection. Teleological explanations attempt to account for things and features by appeal to their contribution to optimal states, or the normal functioning, or the attainment of goals, of wholes or systems they belong to.

⁶ This word has many different senses. The hesitation shown by Goethe's *Faust*, for example, in translating this word in the Bible into German in the first part of *Faust* (lines 1224-37) comes to mind.

appearances. This is not so for Borges for whom these phenomena are all illusions, even in the phenomenal world.

Borges voices disagreement with the concepts of causality and of an absolute reality (Borges' *eje* being God), put forward by Plato, Kant, and also Schopenhauer. Borges denies the validity of those tenets which constitute the world of experience, i.e. the phenomenal world, those tenets being: time, space, the principle of causality, and the notion of the (individuated) self. It must be emphasised that Borges, in denying the existence of those principles even in the phenomenal world, thus diverges most drastically from both Kant and Schopenhauer⁷. Borges' vehement denial of causality leads up to his denial of time and succession. He prepares the ground for his own ensuing refutation of causality and the postulation of *no causalidad*. What all of the doctrines put forward by Borges have in common, be it Schopenhauer's, Plato's, Kant's or Berkeley's, is their teleology, their purposefulness, the notion of causality, of referring one thing to another in a causal, teleological chain, and to place a higher force at its centre, be that force called God or otherwise, whereby this higher reality not only underlies but causes the lesser, i.e. the phenomenal. Borges considers this a major weakness in each one of these doctrines:

Empero tantas divergencias [entre los filósofos citados] tienen un centro común: la configuración práctica de referir un fenómeno a otros [i.e. causality], y remachar a la existencia un eje que, según las idiosincrasias de escuelas, denominase Dios, Representación o Energía. Los que han subrayado esa universal endeblez hanse obstinado en ver en ella una mera bravata del idioma [...]. La culpa está en la indagación, que no en la respuesta.

(‘El cielo azul’, p.156)

This is what Borges objects to most vigorously: the concept of causality which means that in each doctrine, one reality is merely referred to another and thus, in fact, doubled, which is a horrendous notion for Borges (‘El cielo azul’, p.157). This is an early voicing of his repulsion against the doubling of worlds which he is to reiterate all through his creative work.

Borges invites an application of any of the previously given (teleological, causal) doctrines to the landscape and concludes that far from elucidating or

⁷ See Arana (1994) and Nuño (1986) on the logic of the waking state applied to the dream or sleep world.

submerging with our initial impression of the scenery, it (any doctrine of causality) merely adds another layer, another version of the landscape, another present ('El cielo azul'). By referring one reality to another, multiplication, potentially *ad infinitum*, ensues.

Let us, with Sierra (1997, 143) recall that Schopenhauer's view of time is that of an endless present:

Para Schopenhauer el tiempo es también una falacia que forma parte de la 'representación'. Sólo existe el presente: [Dice Schopenhauer:] La forma de la vida es presente sin fin, del mismo modo que los individuos, imágenes de la idea, surgen y desaparecen en el tiempo, comparable a sueños evanescentes.

And for absolute Idealists such as Bradley, knowledge of ultimate reality cannot be attained by any mode of thinking, since perceptions or any other components of the external world do not have any material, independent existence (expounded in *Appearance and Reality* Book xviii, 1946 edition). What really constitute absolute reality are finite centres of experience, unidentifiable for man who is infected by the notion of time. Time, for Bradley, is a matter of relation between events (Urmson and Rée 1989, 53):

[Bradley] shows that quality and relation, substance and cause, space and time, self and object, are all of them, if taken as real, beset by insoluble contradictions and must therefore be dismissed as 'appearance'. The absolute reality must have a nature which transcends all these categories. [...] Reality must have a type of unity unlike anything in our worlds of rational thought, a unity above and beyond relations, a unity to whose nature only the undifferentiated unity of feeling gives any clue. This absolute reality differentiates itself into finite centres of experience which however cannot be identified with human persons because of the element of time which infects all human life.

For Schopenhauer, transcendence was possible through art, for Bradley through feeling. Borges, however, remains forever sceptical of even his own intuition as to the possibility of transcendence, his own feeling, his own experience (as recalled in 'Sentirse en muerte') which he holds insufficient to sustain his doubt. Thus, Borges' 'new present' (the other version) then groups together all other presents into the word 'past' which remains inaccessible and unalterable. Due to the randomness of dividing time into past, present, future, the past is just a word to denote difference, not any inherent temporality ('El cielo azul', p.157). The present does not change into the past but adds another state, another instant. This is how Borges can ask ('La

encrucijada', p.123): 'Dónde está mi vida pretérita?'. The multiplication of instances (what we conventionally consider the past) raises the question: where do these instances go? do they continue to exist⁸? The consideration of the nature of the present moment in relation to the concept of eternity will become more and more crucial as Borges' explorations proceed over time.

Borges asserts that not any one moment (a 'present' one) is capable of modifying another (a 'past' one), i.e. nothing can alter anything, everything is static (*enterizo*). It is not easy for the reader to follow this reasoning; perhaps we may arrive at a better understanding when trying to reason ourselves: if there is no time, then there is no change and everything remains the same; the 'past' is thus indelible, the present does not change into a past state, but merely adds another state, another quality, another hue, another adjective (the blue of the sky). The reason why Borges is so insistent on this inalterability, this *soltura* is because it bears on the notion of identity, on the *yo de conjunto*, which he denies in 'La nadería'.

When Borges speaks of the dream, or rather the nightmare, he does so with the same reasoning in mind: even though we may awake from the dream, it is there, it exists as a mental image, with all the ensuing emotions of distress, and cannot be undone:

El horror de la pesadilla que nos maltrate en la noche no aménguase en un ápice por la comprobación que al despertar hacemos de su 'falsía'.

('El cielo azul', p.157)

The nightmare is the simulacrum of our supposed 'reality'; what would we wake up into, i.e. what would we refer the simulacrum, the phenomenon to? We would wake up into the absolute Reality, except that we cannot fathom this, due to the confines of our limited consciousness. Waking from the illusory empirical world into a reality where we realize that we have been dreaming, is useless, because the underlying Reality, even if there was one, is inaccessible to us, we cannot experience it; we are in a no-man's-land, somehow worse off than before: woken up from the dream, yet left outside Reality; waking from the dream (or slumber) does not reveal Reality, only the knowledge that our supposed reality (the dream) is not real. Both

⁸ This question is of vital significance when considering his 1936 essay 'Historia de la eternidad', p.19.

these scenarios are fates suffered by some of Borges' later, fictional characters. There is no solace in living in the illusion of the dream, nor is there a revelation, a resolution to be experienced into a higher Reality. This no-man's-land is nothingness.

When we link Borges' notion of an unalterable moment with the above, we arrive at the following: the past moment is the dream (nightmare, mirage, reality); the present moment is the waking state. But neither the present moment nor having woken up changes anything. This is so because, according to Borges, there is no time and thus no change. And even if there were to be anything beyond the dream, or the mirage, we would be forever barred from experiencing it. This causes a kind of experiential stalemate. Borges concludes in 'La encrucijada', where he had developed this theme further:

El tiempo es un hecho intelectual y objetivamente no existe. Tendríamos así una eternidad que abarcaría todo el tiempo posible [...] en un presente puro.
(*'La encrucijada'*, p.126)

Borges asserts the inaccessibility of any underlying Reality and holds that since we are forever prisoners of our consciousness and have never experienced anything outside of it, it is pointless to postulate anything outside of this inescapable consciousness (*'El cielo azul'*, p.157):

La verdad es que no podemos salir de nuestra conciencia, que todo acontece en ella como en un teatro único, que hasta hoy nada hemos experimentado fuera de sus confines, y que, por consiguiente, es una impensable y vana porfía esa de presuponer existencias fuera de ella [i.e. an underlying reality].
(*'El cielo azul'*, p.157)

The fault in attempting to access or at least fathom Reality, the fault also in trying to apprehend the nature of the illusory concept of time, however, lies not in language alone, claims Borges, but in posing the question in the first place; but Borges also feels that language is inept at arguing anything but causality, such as his concept of non-causality. He admits that language, his and that of any other, is not the most apt tool to argue non-causality and *soltura* (*'El cielo azul'*, p.157). 'No engañan los sentidos, engaña el entendimiento' (*'El cielo azul'*, p. 157-158). He urges the reader to go beyond that and get to the essence of what he has expounded, upon which s/he will realize that all certainties will tumble down:

Vuestro Yo consumará su jubiloso y definitivo suicidio; las más opuestas opiniones nunca se darán el mentís; la Eternidad, arrugada, cabrá en la corta racha de lo actual, se quebrantarán las formidables sombras teológicas, y el espacio infinito caducará con su exorbitancia de estrellas.

(‘El cielo azul’, p.157-158)

In ‘La encrucijada’ Borges reiterates his conviction, first expressed in ‘El cielo azul’, that there are no underlying divinities nor realities, that life is mere appearance, and that there is no reality, not even to the phenomenal world (p.102), thus deviating, as he had done before and was to do consistently over the following two decades, from both Berkeley and Schopenhauer:

No hay en los árboles divinidades ocultas, ni una inagarrable cosa en sí detrás de las apariencias, ni un yo mitológico que ordena nuestras acciones. La vida es aparencia verdadera.

(‘La encrucijada’, p.102)

There is only appearance, and there is no transcendence of ordinary consciousness (as Schopenhauer had promised). ‘Todo está [appearance, transitory, illusory] y nada es [essence, continual]’ (‘El cielo azul’, p.157). There is no end, no purpose, no cause. Only doubt and scepticism.

Citing Lichtenberg, the eighteenth century German physicist often quoted by Schopenhauer, too, Borges proceeds to question causality and affirms the evanescent nature of all things; the absence of any continuity or permanence; the non-existence of time and the self; the ineptness of language:

¿Y si el principio de causalidad fuera un mito [...]? Esa conjetura [Lichtenberg’s denial of causality] se nos antoja imposible. Sin embargo, una fácil meditación nos convencerá de su validez y hasta de su certidumbre axiomática.

(‘El cielo azul’, p.156-157)

Pero la verdad es que no podemos salir de nuestra consciencia, que todo acontece en ella como en un teatro único, que hasta nada hemos experimentado fuera de sus confines, y que, por consiguiente, es una impensable y vana porfía esa de presuponer existencias allende sus linderos. [...] No hay en la vida continuidades algunas. Ni el tiempo [...] ni el yo [...]. Todo está y nada es.

(‘El cielo azul’, p.157)

Honderich affirms (1995, 487):

Our false philosophy is incorporated in our whole language; we cannot reason without, so to speak, reasoning wrongly. We overlook the fact that speaking, no matter of what, is itself a philosophy.

In place of teleology, Borges proposes non-causality, the *entereza* (see also 'La nadería', p.94 for the solipsistic independence of everything ('El cielo azul', p.156-157). Borges concludes that it is wrong to suppose that a predicate entails a subject and holds that instead, a predicate entails merely a process. From questioning causality, Borges proceeds to question the existence of a subject, of a self⁹.

Borges' conclusion - indeed Borges' philosophy - can be delineated when proceeding from his own analysis and interpretation of Schopenhauer's and Berkeley's Idealism. The consequence in accepting Berkeley's denial of Matter, a most radical statement indeed, would, against all expectation, be far from unsettling since (Urmson and Rée 1989, 48):

The actual course of our everyday experience would be quite unaffected. On Locke's own admission, we are never actually aware of anything but our own ideas; to deny the existence, then, of his 'external objects', material bodies, is not to take anything that has ever entered into our experience, and is indeed to leave quite undisturbed the opinions of unphilosophical men.

For Berkeley, there is no fall of certainties, for Borges, on the other hand, there is the fall of all certainties. It is important to stress again: Idealism, both Schopenhauer's and Berkeley's particular versions of it, does not deny the existence of time, space, causality, and the self in the phenomenal world. But Borges does deny exactly that: his standpoint is that neither the tenets of the phenomenal world, nor that which lies beyond it are real or accessible respectively. Borges denies not only matter, as Berkeley had done, but also that which is held to constitute the phenomenal world: time, space, causality, the self. In this, Borges diverges from Plato, Kant, and Schopenhauer, developing his own strand of idealism, bleakest of bleak, because, quite literally, nothing is, and nothingness reigns supreme: neither the dream nor that which lies beyond it; for even if there were such a Reality beyond the dream, we could never experience it. Borges traces a kind of no-man's-land.

The title of Borges' first essay deserves attention: 'El cielo azul, es cielo y es azul': the impression is that of separateness, of *entereza*, and at the same time of

⁹ It may be asked, though, how, if a predicate entails a process, does this fit with Borges' notion of the illusory nature of the concept of time? Is he contradicting himself? He may be referring to a process in a purely linear or grammatical sense.

soltura: it is not a blue sky, but a sky, and there is blueness, a quality. There is no union, and Borges' assertion that *todo está y nada es* can be tied in here: everything is transitory, is present: *está*; nothing is permanent: *es*. There is no union between the sky and its quality (between the noun and the adjective): 'La vida maciza se requebraja y desparrama' ('El cielo azul', p.157): life is only seemingly solid and certain; there are no unifying elements: the ones that there are, such as the self, are mere illusions. Everything that had hitherto lent certainty and coherence to existence, comes tumbling down. Yet, bleak as this outlook may seem, Borges consoles the reader that it only affects the unimaginable whole of all instances of which life is made up, the non-existent *yo de conjunto* of which he speaks in 'La nadería', and that it does not affect individual instances or even clusters of instances. The self-sufficiency and inalterability of the moment as well as the accumulation of states (Borges' *presentismo*) is left intact:

No hay que dolerse de la confusión que trae consigo esta doctrina, pues ella únicamente atañe al imaginario conjunto de todos los instantes del vivir, dejando en paz el orden y el rigor de cada uno de ellos y aun de pequeños agrupamientos parciales. Lo que sí se vuelve humo son las grandes continuidades metafísicas: el yo, el espacio, el tiempo.

(‘La encrucijada’, p.123)

The kind of Idealism Borges proposes is one which fuses (or rather: which does not accept the difference and the duality) of Kant's appearance and thing in itself; Schopenhauer's worlds of appearances and of will; Bradley's appearance and Absolute; Berkeley's appearance and Reality.

In 'La nadería' of 1923, an essay which Borges is to re-work in 'La encrucijada' of 1925, Borges' focus is on identity and causality. He again denies Descartes and sets out to prove that the concept of personality (self or subject) lacks both metaphysical foundations and innate reality, and that it is a construct brought about by vanity and habit ('La nadería', p.93). He raises a difference between being and existence, between the awareness of being and actual existence. He takes a strong anti-psychological, anti-Romantic stance when he talks of 'idólatras de su yo' (p.99-101): romantic, self-centred, Romantic writers of the nineteenth century, 'egolatría

romántica [...] vocinglero individualismo' (p.101)¹⁰. Most notably, Borges recounts his personal experience of the nothingness of personality.

In the same essay, Borges proposes his definition of what the self is, and is not. He holds that 'identidad personal' ('La nadería', p.94) does not rest in memory; this is a theme which is later to find its way into another one of his fictions in *El Aleph*. In the 1920s, Borges denies that memory entails personal identity; rather: memory is merely a name for the repeatability of one or more states of mind. Memory is a mere repetition of a state of mind, i.e. of one or more sensory perceptions (feel, touch, etc.) (p.95); this is confirmed by our sense of alienation at revisiting any past states (p.96):

Equivócase quien define la identidad personal como la posesión privativa de algún erario de recuerdos.

('La nadería', p.94)

Compare Nuño's claim that Borges uses memory as the antithesis, the antidote to time (1986, 114):

Muerte es uno de los extremos de la cadena temporal: saberlo es saber que dependemos de él; la memoria es el otro extremo y, a la vez, el antídoto de la muerte: conservación de lo vivido, registro (temporal) a favor del hombre. [...] Así, exaltar la memoria es oponerse de algún modo al tiempo con sus propios recursos del tiempo. Ambos temas, la atemporalidad de lo perfecto o modélico y la antitemporalidad de la memoria marcan la gran pugna de Borges con el tiempo.

Borges denies that there is a fixed identity, and instead postulates that the self is no more than a will and some physical attributes of muscular and sensory activity. For him, the self is not in the sum of all states of mind that there ever are (which anyway is unrealizable and therefore cannot be: 'Lo que no se lleva a cabo no existe' (p.95)); the mere temporal linkage of one state of mind to another does not lead to any

¹⁰ Borges quotes Whitman as one who erroneously believed that all he had to do in order to evoke the wonder of things was to enounce the name, the word. He holds that the essence lies not in the word, a view worth remembering when examining his essays on the Cabbala and the sacred word. Although Whitman holds that his enunciation of a word stemmed from an actual experience of the phenomenon, i.e. that his words had full, experimental meaning (p.100-101). Borges introduces the theme of the one being similar to the other and therefore being nobody (p.97-98) and foreshadows the theme of Whitman the author being the all and every reader(s) 'soy semejante a todos los demás' (p.101). And about Torres Villaroel who wrote about Quevedo (p.97-98):

Vio que era semejante a los otros, vale decir, que no era nadie, o que era apenas una algarada confusa, persistiendo en el tiempo y fatigándose en el espacio.

This is one of the first formulations of Borges' theme of the one who is many who is thus nobody. The applications for literature, which Borges establishes in this essay, he later, in 'La encrucijada', eliminates.

absolute order (p.95); new sensations do not add to any existing self (p.96); although any new sensation or state of mind may fill up one's consciousness, it would be a fallacy to therefore assume that this is us in our entirety (p.99-100). Borges is convinced that the only thing he can possess is the mental certainty of being, which, however, does not entail actual existence:

Yo [...] sólo soy una certidumbre que inquiera las palabras más aptas para persuadir tu atención. Ese propósito y algunas sensaciones musculares y la visión de límpida enramada que ponen frente a mi ventana los árboles, construyen mi yo actual [present instant of self]. Fuera vanidad suponer que ese agregado psíquico ha menester asirse a un yo para gozar de validez absoluta, a ese conjetural Jorge Luis Borges en cuya lengua cupo tanto sofisma y en cuyos solitarios paseos los tardeceros del suburbio son gratos. No hay tal yo de conjunto.

(‘La nadería’, p.94)

And neither can existence be proved by sensory perception or the physicality of a body:

No soy mi actividad de ver, de oír, de oler, de gustar, de palpar. Tampoco soy mi cuerpo, que es fenómeno entre otros.

(‘La nadería’, p.103)

The *yo actual* is a present, total instant of self, the ‘agregado psíquico’ (p.94) the accidental, circumstantial, sensory self, plus *una certidumbre* (and thus a consciousness?), and that is all there is; this *yo actual* does not require any other *yo* on which to attach itself, no ‘conjetural Jorge Luis Borges’ (p.94), which the *yo actual* merely made up, conjured up. But although Borges denies the self, he does not deny feeling or conceiving of oneself as an individuated self (p.96), i.e. despite perceiving of something or oneself, this does not entail existence of that thing or self. Let us remember that Borges had quoted Schopenhauer as saying that the verb ‘be’ does not denote self-existence, but that, instead, it merely links the subject and the object. The awareness of being [consciousness], of individuation, however, ‘certidumbre [...] esa consciencia de ser [...] esa seguridad inmediata de aquí estoy yo’ (p.96) does not entail (self)consciousness [*certidumbre?* existence?] (p.104)¹¹:

¹¹ Yet Borges disputes Spencer who holds that there is nothing apart from consciousness; Borges counters Spencer’s refutation of idealism (‘La nadería’, p.124-127). The mention of Spencer is interesting in that, when Borges discusses the ‘infinity of consciousness’, he introduces the notion that infinity need not necessarily be a long time. This is a precursor to his later, more extended discussion of time, infinity, and eternity. Still arguing against Spencer, Borges concludes that the ‘length’ of time or eternity may be very brief (p.126):

También los teólogos hubieron de traducir la eternidad de Dios en una duración sin principio ni fin, sin vicisitudes ni cambio, en un presente puro.

Esa certeza de ser una cosa aislada, individualizada y distinta [the opposite of his notion of wholeness: '*enteriza*' que cada cual siente en las honduras de su alma. Yo no niego esa consciencia de ser ni esa seguridad inmediata del *aquí estoy yo* que alienta en nosotros.

(‘La nadería’, p.96)

Let us juxtapose this experience, this feeling of being against the notion of an Absolute (Honderich 1995, 2):

[The Absolute is] that which has an unconditioned existence, not conditioned by, relative to, or dependent upon anything else. Usually deemed to be the whole of things, conceived as unitary, as spiritual, as self-knowing (at least in part via the human mind), and as rationally intelligible, as finite things [such as time, space, Bradley’s God], considered individually, are not. The expression was introduced into philosophy by Schelling and Hegel. In the English-speaking world it became the key concept of such absolute idealists as [...] F.H.Bradley.

And let us juxtapose the experience of being against Bradley’s Absolute in particular, an Absolute which he holds to be one system and its matter is Experience’ (*Appearance and Reality* 1893, Chp. XIV, 127, 129, 130 and 142 respectively):

The Absolute is not many; there are no independent reals. The universe is one in this sense that its differences exist harmoniously within one whole, beyond which there is nothing. Hence the Absolute is [...] an individual and a system [...]. Can we say anything about the concrete nature of the system? [...] When we ask as to which matter fills up the empty outline, we can reply in one word, that this matter is experience. [...] Sentient experience, in short, is reality, and what is not this is not real.’ [...] ‘Feeling, thought, and volition (any groups under which we class psychical phenomena) are all the material of existence, and there is no other material, actual or even possible.

The Absolute is one system, and its contents are nothing but sentient experience. It will hence be a single and all-inclusive experience, which embraces every partial diversity in concord.

The Absolute holds all possible content in an individual experience where no contradiction can remain.

Borges recounts his own, personal revelation as to the nullity of personality (‘La nadería’, p.98-99) and concludes that that there is no such thing as an enduring, permanent identity (*yo de conjunto*), only fleeting instances or states of self, each subsequent instance annihilating the previous. His own, painful experience is as follows: on departing from his friend whom he is sure never to see again, Borges feels the overwhelming need to bare his soul and offer it to his friend, when all of a sudden he is struck with the conviction that there is no such thing as *personalidad*, that there is nothing persistent or enduring that would lend cohesion to this disjointed,

fragmentary series of self-sufficient (*enterizo*) instances of self, all present and devouring of any previous one; Borges realizes that beyond the merely circumstantial and transitory (lo actual, which is the accidental, the contingent self) he is nothing and nobody. Is there no soul, no essence to his fragmentary being?

He tocado con mi emoción ese desengaño [de tal yo de conjunto] en trance de separarme de un compañero. [...] Entendí ser nada esa personalidad. [...] Ocurrióseme que nunca justificaría mi vida un instante pleno, absoluto, contenedor de los demás, que todos ellos serían etapas provisionarias, aniquiladoras del pasado y encaradas al porvenir, y que fuera de lo episódico, de lo presente, de lo circunstancial, no éramos nadie. Y abominé de todo misteriosismo.

(‘La nadería’, p.99)

His mistake, as he is to recognize in the 1953 prologue to ‘Historia de la eternidad’, here is to treat time as being made up of divisible instances, a mistake that also underlies the paradox. Also, the notion of a Divine would lend coherence and unity to individual selves.

Borges’ resignation into the non-existence of an *instante contenedor de los demás*, his denial of a unity, encompassing all personal states past and present, ties in with what he had asserted in ‘El cielo azul’: that not one moment can modify nor change another, that the past is indelible. Borges’ presentismo is always disjointed, forever fragmentary. He cannot ascertain his soul, his essential self, the *yo de conjunto* which he so vehemently denies yet seems to long for so earnestly. ‘No hay tal yo de conjunto’ says Borges in ‘La nadería’ (p.94). There is no unified, non-circumstantial self, no essential self. He also says that ‘cualquier actualidad de la vida es enteriza y suficiente’ (p.94): every one of life’s instances is whole and self-contained; there is nothing lacking, but also nothing underlying; it is a very disjointed view.

Borges quotes Grimm and states: the self is not the world of appearance, not any sensory phenomena nor any physical entity or existence, and neither is the self consciousness or thought (*cogito*) (‘La nadería’, p.103). So Grimm and Schopenhauer conclude: the self is a static, undifferentiated point of reference for (the passing of) time (p.104). Borges comments that this reduces the self to a mere logical necessity which lacks any properties and any distinguishing marks which would differentiate

one from the other: 'Esta opinión traduce el yo en una mera urgencia lógica, sin cualidades propias ni distinciones de individuo a individuo' ('La nadería', p.104)¹².

In the last of the three 1920s essays, 'La encrucijada' of 1925, Borges takes explicit issue with Berkeley, and in particular with the notion of God as the absolute reality. He develops further his claim that reality is a dream, a mirage, and cements his divergence from the Idealists, expounding an ever more radical view more akin to solipsism. He again has recourse to a refutation of Descartes, and develops his view on language as an accessory to, rather than the culprit of, causality. In this essay of 1925, Borges strengthens and lends coherence to 'La nadería' when he re-states his denial of the self¹³.

If Borges has recourse to Berkeley, it is in order to refute the materialist: only perception ensures existence of things, and these have no 'outside' existence, i.e. they have no existence other than in the minds of the perceiver (p.120). Even when one imagines one thing or another with no-one 'there' to perceive it, that thing then exists as mental image and thus as perception in the mind of the one who imagines the object (p.121). This is how Borges can assert the dream, his *pesadilla*, is.

He explicitly challenges Berkeley on the issue of an underlying reality or Divinity (p.122) and holds that reality is a simulacrum, a mirage: he categorically

¹² In Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* (1927, 27-28) we find the view that the soul is not one of duality (which in itself is an illusion, an erroneous means of making sense of conflicting or contradicting souls within us which is based on the erroneous belief in the 'oneness' of being), but that there is a *multiplicity* of souls within one self, making the self not one but many-faceted. For Borges, the many facets in the *agregado psíquico* is a sign of disunity, and ultimately, of non-existence. It questions, indeed it threatens the notion of self-identity. On the illusion of the oneness of the soul Hesse says (my emphasis):

In Wirklichkeit aber ist kein Ich, auch nicht das naivste, eine Einheit, sondern eine höchst vielfältige Welt, ein kleiner Sternenhimmel, ein Chaos von Formen von Stufen und Zuständen, von Erbschaften und Möglichkeiten. Dass jeder einzelne dies Chaos für eine Einheit anzusehen bestrebt ist und von seinem Ich redet, als sei dies eine einfache, fest geformte, klar umrissene Erscheinung: diese, jedem Menschen [...] geläufige Täuschung scheint eine Notwendigkeit zu sein, eine Forderung des Lebens wie Atemholen und Essen. Die Täuschung beruht auf einer einfachen Übertragung: Als Körper ist jeder Mensch eins, als Seele nie.

See also Fernando Pessoa for the notion of split souls, particularly the poem by Ricardo Reis 'Vivem em nos inúmeros'.

¹³ See 'La postulación de la realidad' where Borges introduces, as a form of literary backup, the distinction between the Classicists and the Romantics in their respective emphasis of the concept of personality.

states that there is nothing underlying our empirical reality, nothing that we might call absolute Reality (this a view which Borges is, decades later, to modify and drastically change). It is we who, in Kantian fashion, postulate our reality and its constituents of time and identity (except that for Kant the phenomenal world is real); it is we, the subjects, who give rise to the illusion of reality, a reality which, once investigated by us, only ever reveals itself for what it is: forever a mirage. Borges' reality is one which, once we cease to exist, vanishes. There is thus no persisting, underlying reality (no soul?) to our fleeting, mortal existence. This compels Borges to claim that there is neither individuation nor continuity. There is no self which holds together, which lends cohesion to the otherwise disjointed, fragmentary processes of thought. Thus, each process is self-sufficient, in Borges' word *enterizo* ('La encrucijada', p.124).

It is to the notion of God as a mere unifying, consolidating force that Borges is opposed in his analysis of Berkeley¹⁴. In order to arrive at his conclusion that things that we perceive with the senses do not have reality (not even in the mind of a God), all we had to do was think that reality is a simulacrum like our reflection in the mirror (p.127):

La Realidad es como esa imagen nuestra que surge en todos los espejos, simulacro que por nosotros existe, que con nosotros viene, gesticula y se va, pero en cuya busca basta ir para siempre dar con él.

('La encrucijada', p.127)

The mirage, the mirror image, the simulacrum, the dream: all are synonyms of Borges' frustrated search for order and structure; for an underlying (absolute) reality or truth; for some permanence giving cohesion to our fleeting mortal existence; some purpose. His quest only confirms to him what his sceptical mind had suspected all along: it renders visible the fissures through which the questioning mind (forever misled by its own limitations) must perceive the futility of any system claiming to prove persistence or purpose or answers. For Borges, therefore, ideas, theories, philosophies and, indeed, the intellect that he employs so astutely, are insufficient.

¹⁴ See Urmson and Rée (1989, 75):

The proof of Descartes' own existence in the *cogito* was, strictly speaking, only a proof that he existed so long as he was thinking. [...] The idea of God as a conserving principle may help to overcome this limitation.

The only conclusion to reach is that there is quite literally nothing beyond, or underneath, the illusion which constitutes our everyday existence.

Borges goes very far indeed when he denies that there is no underlying reality to our dream existence, and he goes further still when he questions the existence of the subject (the dreamer), as well as the existence of the object (the dream itself):

El objeto caduca, y juntamente el sujeto. Ambos enormes sustantivos, espíritu y materia, se desvanecen a un tiempo y la vida se vuelve un enmarañado tropel de situaciones de ánimo, un ensueño sin soñador.

(‘La encrucijada’, p.123)

An analysis of these three 1920s essays reveals an increasing engagement with both the Idealist philosophies and the Platonic doctrine, all of which Borges holds ineffective in resolving the duality of the distinction between the world of appearances and the underlying reality. The fault, what he calls the *talismánico* mistake, lies in the notion of causality, against which Borges poses non-causality. This, in turn, leads him to deny time and identity, which he feels are levelled out not only in the ‘beyond’, but also in the here and now. Borges sees all certainties fall, all that which might give coherence and a sense of centrality. Not even his own feeling of being, *esa certidumbre de ser*, suffices for him to ensure his actual existence.

Not only is reality revealed as a mirage, a dream, an illusion, but so is also the dreamer, the self, the subject. What remains are processes, verbs (i.e. fluid states). This is chaos, causal as well as teleological, and existential barrenness; in other words: nothingness. But what generates the simulacrum? what gives rise to *nuestra imagen*? And if, as Borges says, our supposed reality is nothing but a mirage, and we cannot experience anything outside of our consciousness which is instrumental in both perceiving and creating the mirage (‘El cielo azul, p.157), then there really is no point, as Borges had said, in postulating or imagining anything outside of that confined consciousness; then we are forever the prisoner of the mirror, holding its reflection to be the real thing. That is: we are not able to see anything but the mirage yet we know that it is a mirage. Thus knowledge no longer liberates nor enlightens. Knowledge, or what we hold as such, torments and isolates the individual who does not have any place of belonging other than to the fragmentary, fleeting and unreal.

For Borges, there is no distinction between dream and reality, between the world of appearances and the world as it is in itself. Borges' empirical world (unlike Kant's and Schopenhauer's) is indeed illusion. When Borges denies the self, time, space and causality in the empirical world (the here and now), he applies the rules of the world as it is in itself (where indeed none of the above hold, where there is no individuation and no temporality) to the world of appearances. It is indeed Nuño's view that Borges applies the rules of the dream world to the waking world (also discussed in Nuño 1986, 38). Borges is aware of both worlds: the dream world of both his and everybody else's everyday experience (the empirical world, or world of appearances) and the world which, were it real, should underlie the illusion¹⁵. Borges' awareness of an Absolute is threefold: Firstly, it is an intellectual understanding, partly grounded in the necessity which results from the belief in a world of appearances, that is: if the empirical world is appearance, then it follows that there must be something beyond these appearances. Secondly, it is based on actual mythical, transcendental experience; and thirdly, despite intellectual understanding and mystical experience (or at any rate: the yearning for it), it is undermined by doubt and scepticism. But mostly: Borges is most acutely aware of the unattainable, the unexperienceable character of this illusory, yet longed-for Absolute. Borges is not enriched by that dual knowledge, but burdened, hindered, tormented by his conflicting awareness. This produces a sensation reminiscent of that suffered by Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* who is both endowed and cursed with the awareness of living a life in the In-Between: in-between times, in-between religions - but mostly, and most painfully so: in-between selves¹⁶.

This duality, this conflict is shared by Borges and produces a kind of sickness of the soul, a painful questioning of all that seemed certain and true. It accounts for a sense of strangeness to the world, and also for a strangeness, a lostness to an innermost core or essence of personal identity and of belonging.

¹⁵ See note 14.

¹⁶ Says Hesse in *Der Steppenwolf* (first published 1927, 27-28):

[Der Steppenwolf] gehört zu jenen, [...] die aus aller Geborgenheit und Unschuld herausgefallen sind, zu denen, deren Schicksal es ist, alle Fragwürdigkeit des Menschenlebens gesteigert als persönliche Qual und Hölle zu erleben.

Whereas the period between 1922 and 1925 is marked in Borges' essayistic writing by the denial of the concepts of time and of self, the year 1928 sees the publication of a crucial text, where Borges can be seen to make a significant shift away from the denial of time, to the experience, albeit fleeting, of timelessness, and of an intimation of what he terms 'eternity'. While a year later he arrives back at the conclusion of the non-existence of time, the three years between 1928 and 1931 see him explore the concept of time in the light of the notion of infinity, before, in 1934 arriving at pained explorations of cyclical time.

'Sentirse en muerte' of 1928 can be seen as a prelude to mysticism, where Borges intimates an experience of eternity and of oneness. It is a crucial text in that it reveals Borges' glimpse of the alternative to the non-existence of time, which had marked his writing in the years between 1922 and 1925. The slightly later essays 'La duración del infierno' and 'La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga', both of 1929, introduce the themes of the paradox. They link the loss of personal identity to the notion of infinity (as yet not differentiated by Borges from eternity), which is a manifestation of time *en abîme*. In 1931 Borges explores mystical concepts of Judaism in 'Una vindicación de la Cábala', and Gnosticism in 'Una vindicación del falso Basílides', where he introduces the themes of knowledge and enlightenment, salvation, faith, and concepts of God. Lastly in this cycle of essays which spans the years 1928 to 1934, Borges writes 'La doctrina de los ciclos' in 1934, where he engages with Nietzsche's cyclical notion of time as put forward in the concept of the Eternal Return of the Same. 'La doctrina de los ciclos' can be seen as a prelude to his own alternative to infinite cycles, put forward in 1943 with 'El tiempo circular'.

Whereas in the early 1920s Borges had flatly, and intensely, denied notions of time and of selfhood, he does, in the course of the subsequent decades, develop a more differentiated approach to these concepts. While he still arrives at a fundamental denial, this is through a process of arguing, debating, postulating and refuting. In short: a more mature approach, whose evolution and progression can be traced

chronologically. This tension - between the refutation of time and identity in the early 1920s on the one hand, and resignation in the 1940s into their inescapability on the other - is only ever relieved in a very few and privileged, almost mystical moments of transcendence when Borges actually lives timelessness, eternity and the release from individuation.

1928: Prelude to Mysticism

'Sentirse en muerte' is perhaps the most crucial text in marking the threefold transition from Borges' rejection of time in the early 1920s, to the intuition of time as eternal in 1928, to the notion of time as infinite in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and lastly to the notion of time as cyclical from then onwards.

The experience recorded in 'Sentirse en muerte' comes very shortly after an intense period of denial in early 1920s, where his emphasis had been on the individuation of the self, a state of separateness which does not allow for *un instante pleno, contenedor de los demás*. What he experienced in 1928, in turn, is the release from time and individuation. He cherishes and ceaselessly recounts this fleeting moment of release, which he calls *sentirse en muerte*. It is a moment when Borges feels liberated from the probing and tensions of his intellect and released into intuitive certainty beyond words and reason. This stricture is at the heart of his particular style of argumentation, which oscillates between postulation and refutation of a given doctrine; between intellectual scepticism and intuitive certainty. It also makes for a shifting text which is, in the words of Molloy (1994) 'oscillating between fixity and non-fixity'.

'Sentirse en muerte' was published for the first time as the second of 'Dos esquinas' in *El idioma de los argentinos* (1928). It was subsequently included in another two essays in 1936 as an elucidation to 'Historia de la eternidad' (in *Historia de la eternidad*); and for the third time as part of 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, A' (in *Otras Inquisiciones*). 'Sentirse en muerte', in all these contexts, appears in always

exactly the same wording, to which Borges made no additions nor alterations over the years.

Let us recall the story: one night Borges embarks on an aimless stroll through the mythical backstreets of his childhood; this leads him to a corner of the simplest beauty, a sight so typical it seems to him unreal. It occurs to him that the footpath is made of the clay of a still unconquered America, and as he pauses to contemplate the scene he realizes that everything is the same as it had been thirty years previously. A past that he ponders might be recent for other nations, yet remote for Argentina. At the sound of crickets and a bird he no longer thinks but feels the past. In a moment of awe-inspiring knowledge, Borges realises that he has not gone back in time but instead is part of eternity. There follows an analytical account in which he reaches the conclusion that what he had experienced was not only identical to a past experience, but was this very experience, that it was one and the same in a timeless zone of eternity. Time has been refuted by the total identity of two apparently separate moments. This foreshadows Borges' exploration of Leibniz and also indicates that his refutation is by experience, not via the intellect or logic. But moments of total identity are few and limited, from which Borges derives the conclusion that they may be recurrent and immortal. What is tangible with our sentiment, however, is not so for our intellect, in which, Borges sighs, time persists despite all refutations.

The first thing to notice is the oxymoronic nature of 'purposive aimlessness' which Borges imposes on his wanderings by consciously seeking out the most unlikely avenues. He deliberately deprives (or spares) himself of pre-conceived sense experiences by not allowing anticipation to interfere with whatever experience there is to come. What strikes him in the subsequent scene of unsolitary typicality (i.e. that which is representational of what *is*) is the quality of irreality, reversing all order. What Borges calls typical is the generic which, contrary to expectation, does not confer reality, but irreality. The generic, the whole had earlier been identified with the archetypal or ultimate reality. Borges perceives ultimate reality ('unreal' since it is held to be inaccessible in the ordinary world), by seeing what lies beyond: the F/form, that which he denies in 1936, but which he affirms in 1952 in 'Historia de la eternidad'.

The clay of the unconquered continent, untouched by time, lends an air of timelessness, sadly deflated, however, by Borges' conjecture of imagining that remote past, spanning much more than the objective thirty years. Individual times do not tally with the absolute time transpired. The crucial point at which he finally abandons thought is when he hears the song of a bird, and mere words deepen into a profound reality in which he feels an abstract observer. Being abstract, he is withdrawn and separated from matter, embodiment, and example. He is now Ideal in the Platonic sense; this is how he can feel dead, freed of material identity and weight: 'me sentí muerto, me sentí percibidor abstracto del mundo: indefinido temor inbuido de ciencia que es la mejor claridad de la metafísica.' His fear, possibly his awe, Borges feels is inspired by a knowledge synonymous with science, which is a kind of truth. Now he feels and lives that total identity which bestows upon him the revelation of the Eternal Return which is Eternity in the truly Nietzschean sense of eternalized temporality.

It is no small coincidence that Borges' moment of timelessness and his intimation of eternity should be preceded by his awareness of animals: 'Talvez cantaba un pájaro y sentí por él un cariño chico, y de tamaño de pájaro; pero lo más seguro es que en ese ya vertiginoso silencio no hubo más ruido que el también intemporal de los grillos' (p.40).

Let us briefly recall the Platonic relation between the generic species and the individual being, put forward in 'Historia de la eternidad' (p.18): 'los individuos y las cosas existen en cuanto participan de la especie que los incluye, que es su realidad permanente'. Animals are therefore not separate individuals but part of the generic, the Form which is permanent reality. In Nietzsche's mode of thinking, the Eternal Return is revealed to animals who are at one with the vicissitudes of change; they are an integral part of Being, rather than its opponent, such as man is. There is no aim and no direction, only the awareness of always and recurrently being the same. Bound within the cycle, Nietzsche's animals lack any sense of teleology.

Nietzsche rejects the view that the world develops in a linear manner, proceeding towards a pre-established final goal; the will to power does not aim at a final state. In this respect, he had departed from Schopenhauer who held that animals

are determined by a purposive will¹. But like Nietzsche's, Schopenhauer's animals live in the timeless zone of the perpetual present unmarred by notions of memory and death 'Historia de la eternidad' (p.19). Eight years prior, in his moment of truth in 'Sentirse en muerte', Borges lives the affirmation of what he had previously conceded only reluctantly: 'La primacía de la especie y la casi perfecta nulidad de los individuos' in 'Sentirse en muerte' (p.18)². For a brief moment he has entered the timelessness of the Eternal Return, he has become animal by feeling animal (*sentí por él [el pájaro] un cariño chico, y de tamaño de pájaro*), he is no longer the singular Borges but immersed in a whole, feeling immortal.

This is a view on eternity which Borges associates with wholeness, plenitude, intemporality, epiphany, transcendence of time and self. In 'Sentirse en muerte', eternity is being timeless in time, as it were; the experience of two identical moments, one past one present, as one and the same; being, one might say, self-less within the self or as a self. The release from these painful, nihilistic, intellectual torments is the mystical experience of the timeless moment; the moment past and present alike; the abstraction from individual perception: *sentirse en muerte*. It transcribes the mystical experience of eternity in a moment of epiphany in a release from temporality and individuation.

The finiteness, *nuestra pobreza*, of such moments of total identity must result in an eternal return, thus rendering the moment and the perceiver immortal and timeless. But soon his intellect takes over and he analyses his experience beyond words. Yet intellect and language cannot grasp the intemporal, though sentiment yearns for it. Lorenz states (1975, 143-144):

¹ See Cartwright (1992, 14):

The shape or organic body of the species is determined by the will according to circumstance. There is thus a blind purposiveness operating in nature as the will moves towards to its own ends. Despite this will in nature, nature itself is not the work of a will guided by knowledge and distinct from it, such as might be found in God. If the will is seen to perform according to moral imperatives, it is only in that it satisfies the two requirements of morality: it is free and responsible for nature. Schopenhauer thus found a connection other than Divine between the physical order of things and the moral order.

² However, Borges goes on to argue that, although we accept the Form in matters other than our individual case, we do not accept the full impact of it when it comes to our individuality threatened by becoming absorbed into the gigantic uniformity of Human Mankind (p.20).

Un conocimiento satisfactorio y liberador por parte del hombre, es identificado por Borges con la salida o centro del laberinto. El hecho de que salida y centro sean idénticos se explica no sólo por medio de la arquitectura, sino también por la mitología del laberinto. El pensamiento arcaico-mitológico contiene en su centro un lugar sagrado en el que el hombre puede unirse al 'cielo' o a la divinidad. El encuentro con este centro salvador está vinculado al problema del tiempo, de la identidad o individualidad del destino. Para Schopenhauer, el tiempo es también una falacia que forma parte de la 'representación'. Sólo existe el presente:

'La forma de la vida es presente sin fin, del mismo modo que los individuos, imágenes de la idea, surgen y desaparecen en el tiempo, comparable a sueños evanescentes'

[*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, I, 54].

Borges tuvo en su juventud una vivencia de la intemporalidad muy afectiva [i.e. 'Sentirse en muerte'], lo que le lleva a afirmar entusiasmado la supresión del tiempo de Schopenhauer. [...] En una entrevista en 'Die Welt' del 26 de junio de 1965 declaró Borges que el tema del tiempo en sentido metafísico está estrechamente unido al tema de la identidad de la persona.

Lorenz (1975, 144) follows this by a discussion of some of Borges' later stories which link the dissolution of time with the dissolution of identity: 'El Sur', 'La escritura del Dios', 'El Zahir', 'Los teólogos'.

Borges and Bradley

It is only with faith that Borges' explorations into philosophical ideas of losing one's individuality, the transcendence of time into eternity and his fascination with the notion of the self reaching union or communion with a higher reality or Being - as explored by those Idealist philosophers who are drawn to mystical or spiritual visions, such as Schopenhauer and Bradley - could be solved. 'Sentirse en muerte'³ is a recording of Borges' personal experience of transcending time and identity, a transcendence which, with its emphasis on experience, echoes Bradley's notion of the Absolute (in *Appearance and Reality*, Chapter XVIII, 1946 edition, 185):

The Absolute is timeless, but it possesses time as an isolated aspect, an aspect which, in ceasing to be isolated, loses its special character.

Borges' notion of finite centres of experience of 'La nadería', and his intuition, yet also his conviction as to the insufficiency of the personal experience (the resigned view expressed at the end of 'Sentirse en muerte'), bears echoes of Bradley

³ Whose relevance has been acknowledged by those critics who focus on the philosophical dimension of Borges' work: Sierra (1997), Nuño (1986), Arana (1994), Paoli (1992), and Lorenz (1975).

(*Appearance and Reality*, 1893, 1946 edition), yet Borges takes his doctrine to an extreme. Let us recall Bradley's tenet (Urmson and Rée 1989, 53):

[Bradley] shows that quality and relation, substance and cause, space and time, self and object, are all of them, if taken as real, beset by insoluble contradictions and must therefore be dismissed as 'appearance'. The absolute reality must have a nature which transcends all these categories. [...] Reality must have a type of unity unlike anything in our worlds of rational thought, a unity above and beyond relations, a unity to whose nature only the undifferentiated unity of feeling gives any clue. This absolute reality differentiates itself into finite centres of experience which however cannot be identified with human persons because of the element of time which infects all human life.

For Bradley (cited in Honderich 1995, 2), the Absolute is:

That which has an unconditioned existence, not conditioned by, relative to, or dependent upon anything else. Usually deemed to be the whole of things, conceived as unitary, as spiritual, as self-knowing (at least in part via the human mind), and as rationally intelligible, as finite things, considered individually, are not. The expression was introduced into philosophy by Schelling and Hegel. In the English-speaking world it became the key concept of such absolute idealists as [...] F.H.Bradley.

In the previous chapter we saw how for Bradley (1893, 1946 edition, esp. Chp. XIV) 'the Absolute is one system and its matter is Experience'. Furthermore, his notion of the Absolute bears the hallmark of supreme unity (Bradley, 405):

The Absolute is present in, and, in a sense, it is alike each of its special appearances. [...] Everything is experience, and also experience is one.

On teleology, causality, and the absence of chance, he (Bradley, 404) reflects:

In the Absolute no appearance can be lost. Each one contributes and is essential to the unity of the whole. And hence we have observed [...] that any one aspect, when viewed by itself, may be regarded as the end for which the others exist. [...] There is nothing in the Absolute which is barely contingent or merely accessory.

So it must be emphasized that for Bradley, causality and teleology hold, even in the Absolute, which, as such, holds all together, but, equally important is it to stress that Borges' Absolute is not God (pp. 395, 397, and 431 respectively)⁴:

If you identify the Absolute with God, that is not the God of religion. If again you separate them, God becomes a finite factor in the Whole.

God is but an aspect, and that must mean but an appearance, of the Absolute.

The Absolute is each appearance, and is all, but it is not any one as such. [...]

⁴ The relevance of this will become more pertinent still when discussing the Buddhist idea of Menandro's carriage in the next chapter.

Everything is essential, and yet one thing is worthless in comparison with others. Nothing is perfect, as such, and yet everything in some degree contains a vital function of Perfection. Every attitude of experience, every sphere or level of the world, is a necessary factor in the Absolute.

In the Absolute there are thus no contingencies⁵. This view is unlike Hume's for whom there are no necessary connections over time. It is also a view unlike Borges', for whom, in what must be his most radical departure from both Hume and Bradley, there is no causality, not even in the phenomenal world. Bradley's conviction that the Thing-in-itself is impossible to experience corresponds to Kant's view and claims the relativity of our world of experience, the relativity of (the direction of) time and space, and the possibility of parallel lives (Bradley, p. 190)⁶:

To transcend experience and to reach a world of Things-in-themselves, I agree, is impossible. But does it follow that the whole universe in every sense is a possible object of *my* experience?

[...]

It is not hard to conceive a variety of time-series existing in the Absolute. And the direction of each series, one can understand, may be relative to itself, and may have, as such, no meaning outside.

[...]

We might suppose that, corresponding to each of our lives, there is another individual. There is a man who traverses the same history with ourselves, but in the opposite direction.

Since the Absolute is necessary and possible, for Bradley it is therefore real (p.195):

Our Absolute must be; and now, in another respect, it has turned out possible. Surely therefore it is real.

In Book xviii (p.192), Bradley advocates the relation between time and the Absolute. For an absolute Idealist such as Bradley, knowledge of ultimate reality cannot be attained by any mode of thinking, since perceptions or any other components of the external world do not have any material, independent existence. What really constitute absolute reality are finite centres of experience, unidentifiable

⁵ Bradley, who had been instrumental in the present analysis of Borges' essays of the early 1920s, appears again, explicitly acknowledged. Borges had chosen Bradley for an epigraph to *El idioma de los argentinos*, the collection of essays which features 'Sentirse en muerte' for the first time. The epigraph gives us Borges' distilled version of the absolute moment, which seems to be an ideal for Borges. The epigraph by Bradley is as follows:

'Para el amor no satisfecho el mundo es misterio, un misterio que el amor satisfecho parece comprender.' Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, XV.

⁶ For a fictional rendering see Borges' 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' and Bradley's own exposition of the relation between space, time and the Absolute see Bradley, 1946 edition, 181.

for man who is infected by the notion of time. Time, for Bradley, is a matter of relation between events. What for Schopenhauer is art to transcend ordinary consciousness, is feeling for Bradley.

Both Borges' emphasis in 'Sentirse en muerte', and Bradley's emphasis is on experience. But there is a tension between the total vision, or the glimpse of the Absolute - which is linked to a mystical yearning for transcendence - and Borges' relapse into scepticism. At this stage in his writing and his thinking, Borges can be seen to be making a move towards a differentiation: it appears that the poles have by now, towards the late 1920s, slightly but significantly shifted: no longer does Borges oscillate between the poles of time and the nullity thereof, but he oscillates between time and eternity. This reveals an opening, a widening of horizons, both intellectual and emotional.

The title 'Sentirse en muerte' points at transcendence of time and death but stops at death (*muerte*), i.e. at temporality and does not point any further. Temporality reigns even in and after transcendence; the ephemeral wins over the transcendental. *Muerte*, a final form of linear time, is perceived as the final obliterator, the ultimate multiplier of the self into the multitude of all selves; or perhaps the unfolding of selves brings on a death of sorts, the death of a unique selfhood.

Borges' interpretations and renderings of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, and of Nietzsche, of Idealism and of Schopenhauer are linked to the mystical yearning for transcendence of time and individuation. The following is Bradley's rendering of the nature of time, and of how time relates to eternity (Chapter 18, 185)⁷:

⁷ In 'Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain', the Borges-narrator evokes Bradley's inverse universe in which the effect precedes the cause (*Appearance and Reality*, Book XVIII, p.190), and in 'Historia de la eternidad' (p.12) Borges proposes the regressionary concept of time:

Bradley [...] adelanta una hipótesis personal: excluir el porvenir, que es una mera construcción de nuestra esperanza, y reducir lo 'actual' a la agonía del momento presente desintegrándose en el pasado. [...] Bradley niega el futuro [...].

For a fictional rendering of Bradley's notion of time see Borges' 'Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain':

[...] aquel inverso mundo de Bradley, en que la muerte precede al nacimiento y la cicatriz a la herida y la herida al golpe (*Appearance and Reality*, 1897: p.215; 1893: p.190)

Time is an appearance which contradicts itself, and endeavours vainly to appear as an attribute of the timeless [i.e. eternity] [...]. Time is not real as such, and it proclaims its unreality by its inconsistent attempt to be an adjective of the timeless. It is an appearance which belongs to a higher character in which its special quality is merged. Its own temporal nature does not there cease wholly to exist but is thoroughly transmuted. It is counterbalanced and, as such, lost within an all-inclusive harmony. The Absolute is timeless, but it possesses time as an isolated aspect, an aspect which, in ceasing to be isolated, loses its special character. It is there, but blended into a whole which we cannot realize. But that we cannot realize it, and do not know how in particular it can exist, does not show it to be impossible. It is possible, and, as before, its possibility is enough. For that which can be, and upon a general ground must be - that surely is real.

The liminal revelation of the timeless moment recalls the experience of the nullity of self and personality Borges had recounted in 'La nadería'. The fundamental difference between the two experiences, despite their revelatory character, is the experience in 1923 that *no hay en mi vida un instante pleno, contenedor de los demás* and the one of 1928, the moment of timelessness of being enfolded in eternal oneness, is that the former is negative, annihilating any notion of oneness and of plenitude (and also never to be recounted again), whereas the latter, the resolution of temporality, recounted over three decades, is positive. It is what Borges longs for and yet only ever experiences as a fleeting state of utter contentedness.

'Sentirse en muerte' is about the experience of a union with, and at the same time a transcendence of, the material universe; at once becoming one with the material universe, and dissolving its very constituents: time and selfhood. This is reminiscent of the mystic who, in Divine union, passes from time to eternity. But is Borges' ecstatic moment Divine? Is it a union with God? The experience recounted in 'Sentirse en muerte' is a case of transcendence. But it is not mystical, not life-transforming. The experience, the transcendence, the salvation is only quasi-spiritual; it is fleeting, albeit forever remembered, not offering any real solace; reiterated over decades but never repeated again, let alone sustained.

1929: Infinity and Paradox

Borges' very attempts at finding order, universal design, or answers do reveal to him the fissures through which he must perceive the futility of any system claiming

to answer chaos and uncertainty. It is the counter-intuitive logic of the paradox (which perpetrates the notion of infinity) that reveals these fissures in our carefully constructed reality, and the artifice of time, space and identity shows itself for what it is: forever artifice, forever mirage. Borges, 'torn between the splendour and the despair afforded by the paradox', in Beatriz Sarlo's words (1993, 58), returns, time and time again, to probe the consequences of the concept of infinity - of the *regressus ad infinitum*, of Sarlo's 'structure en abîme' (1993, 56) - which threatens causality, teleology, order, motion and hence time.

The experience of timelessness of 'Sentirse en muerte' foreshadows the dream Borges tells in 'La duración del infierno', the nightmare of losing his sense of identity and forever waking into another dream. Dreams, visions and intuition bear great conviction and, albeit fleetingly so, supersede the logic of his intellect. They are also very close to the experience of the mystic. But there is a crucial difference: while the mystic's emptying of self is perceived as positive, the loss or oblivion of self in Borges' dream in 'La duración del infierno' is experienced as appalling. It is more akin to Borges' experience of parting from his friend, which he recounts in 'La nadería', and which had led him to conclude that there is no essence to his self, no self at all.

In 'La duración del infierno', Borges puts hell forward as a metaphor of the immortal. He sees eternity as perpetuity, the attributes of hell ('perduración sin fin' p.102) and sets out to invalidate this kind of eternity (p.99-100)⁸. He differentiates between different types of eternity (p.100), and, in the 'Posdata', tells of a further personal experience: the nightmare of waking into another dream where he had lost all sense of place and identity. For the first time, he establishes a link between the oblivion or loss of identity on the one hand, and eternity, time, and hell on the other. Borges also puts forward that idea the hell is God's oblivion, since immortality is an attribute of the Divine. (p.100). His emphasis is on God, and on the impossibility, the indecency of the notion of infinity. Borges also introduces the problem of evil (p.100):

⁸ For a discussion of the salience and relevance of infinity (which Borges equates with perpetuity) in the work of Borges see Barrenechea (1957, chapter 1).

Soñé que salía de otro [sueño] - populoso de cataclismos y de tumultos - y que me despertaba en una pieza irreconcocible [...]. Pensé con miedo *¿dónde estoy?* Y comprendí que no lo sabía. Pensé *¿quién soy?* Y no me pude reconocer. El miedo creció en mí. Pensé: Esta vigilia desconsolada ya es el Infierno, esta vigilia sin destino será mi eternidad. Entonces desperté de veras: temblando.

(‘La duración del infierno’, p.103)

In 1932 Borges writes:

La duración del infierno *declara mi afición incredula y persistente por las dificultades teológicas. Digo lo mismo de La* penúltima versión de la realidad.

(‘Prólogo’, in *Discusión*, p.9)

The notion of infinity, and thus of time and space, constitutes the backbone of the paradox which in turn questions the nature of reality and the universe. Borges’ claim to be interested in the afterlife but not to believe in it (‘Notas’, p.174) is a less obvious variation of the same subject, anchored in the Heaven and Hell debate in ‘La duración del infierno’, ‘Nota sobre Walt Whitman’, and the ‘Notas’ in the 1964 edition of *Discusión*.

Initially, Borges’ debate in ‘La duración del infierno’ revolves around the nature of Heaven and Hell and what gives rise to their conception. Borges quotes views that hold the mind the originator, and God, Heaven and Hell are seen to be mere proofs of the human imagination (p.172), the soul (p.173), a dream, or the manifestation of human fear (p.102). But fear of what? Possibly the fear of falling into oblivion after death, of a void. The notions of God, Heaven and Hell (and of religion in general) would therefore be no more than man-made simulacra born out of the fear to simply disappear. Hence the claim that Hell is man’s blasphemous name given to God’s oblivion (p.100). The other, quite mundane reason to sustain the belief in Heaven and Hell, he claims (p.101), is of a pedagogical nature in that the threat of hell serves a mere disciplinary purpose and would be equally man-made.

On a more metaphysical level, Hell is a metaphor of immortality (p.97), and thus of eternity: it is a never-ending state; no end implies no beginning and therefore eternity. Argued differently, and in contradiction to the notion of eternity as an ever-open realm of possibilities, however, Heaven and Hell can be seen to be the very end of man’s earthly and the beginning of spiritual afterlife; it is thus a progression from one form of existence to another; progression entails purpose and destination and is

significantly a manifestation of cause and effect: Borges argues that a sinful life leads into Hell, a just life into Heaven.

This concern (even in its refutations, p.100) is linked to the three broad concepts already identified and which seem to lie at the heart of many Borgesian topics: simulacrum (i.e. reality as artefact), eternity or infiniteness, and causality. The synthesis of all three concepts is forged into the assumption, deplorable yet the most probable to Borges, that eternal condemnation or salvation is a question of choices exercised by the human will (p.102).

In the same year, 1929, Borges also introduces the paradox which in principle has infinity at its heart. He postulates not only the illusory nature of the world, such as any Idealist would, but he also urges to look for irrealities, such as Zeno's paradox, to confirm that illusion. For a definition of paradox see Honderich (1995, 642-643):

Part of any such feature [common to the various paradoxes] would be the idea of conflict. [...] 'Paradox' [...] applies [...] to the conflict itself, when it is a conflict between what are (or have been) regarded as fundamental truths. [...] An early propounder of the liar paradox, Eubulides of Megara [intended to] discredit rationalism by showing that its basic standards of reasoning themselves lead to what they reject - inconsistency. The derived contradiction may be contrary to reason, but it is also derived according to reason.

Paradoxes pose questions of causality and infinity. Defined as apparently self-contradictory statements, they are methodological and therefore convincing, yet infuriatingly irresolvable. They encompass the tension of truth and error by leading to a necessary yet absurd or counter-intuitive solution which disqualifies the initial premises, demonstrating the power and at the same time the limitations of logic.

The four most famous Zenoan paradoxes are the ones named Achilles and the Tortoise (which proves that the slower mover will never be passed by the swifter), The Dichotomy (in which an object never reaches the end in a finite time), The Arrow (in which a moving object is actually at rest), and The Stadium (where of two sets of objects travelling at the same velocity one will travel twice as far as the other in the same time). They all aim at the *reductio ad absurdum* of the claims that the many are

and that motion exists, thus supporting Parmenides' monistic claim of a single reality and a motionless Being. It is questions of a philosophical or theological nature which give rise to these paradoxes and since the quality of infiniteness entails eternity, which in turn is a Divine attribute, paradoxes can be instrumental in furnishing proof of the existence of God.

At the heart of their argumentation lies the notion of infinity, for Borges 'un concepto corruptor y desatinador' ('La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga', p.129¹⁰), possibly because it perverts all other existential notions such as those of a beginning and an end, or of origin and destiny. Thinkers have always used paradoxes and the principle of infinite regression or progression in order to question the validity of any proof, knowledge, or philosophy itself. The logical yet absurd nature of paradoxes have bestowed upon these enterprises success of a very disconcerting nature. Logic and reason refute our intuitive apprehension of reality by showing us a reality which, according to the very laws of logic and reason, we cannot possibly inhabit. The superiority of the paradox, or, 'image' as Sarlo calls it (1993, 56), over reality is exemplified in the fact that, in the paradox's logic, Achilles never reaches the tortoise, yet when transposed into our reality he does so indeed. Logic thus defeats its own logic. This creates a tension between what can be perceived logically and what can be perceived by the senses, i.e. empirically. Logic, reason, and the empiricism which experience provides, are therefore incompatible, and any demand for knowledge which is based on experience is futile: if only reason leads to true knowledge, founded in experience which yet is contradictory to reason, then this quest is doomed from the very outset.

Paradoxes explore the very possibilities available to the human mind and lay open the limitations of that mind in trying to apprehend reality and organise patterns that correspond to that reality. In the case of Achilles and the tortoise, the paradox affects the logic of reasoning, common sense, empiricism and also identity in the following way: the purposive movement of Achilles' race does not lead anywhere, it is movement within a larger stasis which brings the subject ever closer to the original point of departure without actually having moved. And movement, conventionally

¹⁰ For further discussion of the paradox in Borges see Nuño (1986, Part 5, 17 and 78).

perceived to lead the subject of the motion away from his/her point of departure, in the paradox seems to be approached in reverse order by proceeding from the supposed destination of the movement to the original point. It is a reversed, counter-intuitive order comparable to that explored in the causality debate. Movement in the paradoxical world does not have any destination, and if we accept that destination entails purpose, destiny, and individuality, the actors are deprived of all three qualities. But not only that: by denying the logical consequences of a definition such as 'Achilles is the fastest runner of Crete' in not letting him overtake the by definition slower tortoise, Achilles belies his name and, since what defines him bestows on him individuality, he belies his identity.

The principle of effect and cause *ad infinitum* had led Thomas Aquinas to deduce that, since everything in the universe had a cause which in turn was the effect of another cause and so on *ad infinitum*, there must be a first cause, or Aristotelian Prime Mover which he identified as the Divinity. Causality is the underlying principle of Aquinas' proof of the existence of God, and the Divinity lies also at the heart of the Zenoan paradoxes which in turn are governed by the *regressus* (in some cases the *progressus*) *in infinitum*. The common, if not linking elements are the paradox, Divinity, and infiniteness.

Borges continuously examines the many ways in which the universe could possibly be organized while happily exposing the failure of imposing any such system. In this manner he does not allow for any resolution and therefore halt to the creative process of intellectual conjectures so stimulating to a mind which seeks order only to invalidate the order found. Anything seems possible, everything is proved impossible, and nothing is excluded. So, is the world nothing but an illusion? It certainly is a strong possibility, and proofs abound. Let us go back to Zeno's main concern of giving illustrative support to the monist Parmenides who believed in a single reality. Because he assumed this reality to be eternal and unchanging, he came to the astonishing conclusion that this world, the world of our experience, cannot be real as it is constantly changing. And nor could we ever know the real world since we are as inconsistent and changing as the other things of our experience. We are, therefore, at

best, living in a kind of illusion and not in reality at all. The mathematician Zeno carried this bizarre conclusion even further and argued, by means of his famous paradoxes, that all motion and change is nothing but an illusion.

A decade later in 1939, Borges takes up the paradox once again with 'Avatares de la tortuga'. He expresses his conviction that we invest the dream world with reality, temporality and personal identity, but that with it we weave in the flaws (*intersticios de sinrazón*, such as the paradox) through which we must perceive its falseness. This likens us, the dreamers, to Novalis' magician who takes his illusions for independent, real occurrences:

El mayor hechicero (escribe memorablemente Novalis) sería el que hechizara hasta el punto de tomar sus propias fantasmagorías por apariciones autónomas. ¿No sería ése nuestro caso?' Yo conjeturo que así es. Nosotros (la indivisa divinidad que opera en nosotros) hemos soñado el mundo. Lo hemos soñado resistente, misterioso, visible, ubicuo en el espacio y firme en el tiempo; pero hemos consentido en su arquitectura tenues y eternos intersticios de sinrazón para saber que es falso.
(*'Avatares de la tortuga'*, p.136)

The many confirmations and refutations of the premises and the conclusion alike (see 'La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga' of 1929 and 'Avatares de la tortuga' of 1939) reveal a fundamental concern of scholars of all times to come to terms with the nature of reality, truth, and the universe. Borges himself contributed his version of the paradox in 'Notas' (p.166), which resumes both Russell's paradox of the set of all sets which would have to contain itself, and Epimenides the Cretan's who claims that all Cretans are liars. In an essay added in 1957 to *Discusión*, 'Notas' (No. 2, p.166), Borges adds his own version to the many illustrious paradoxes:

A esas perplejidades ilustres [Russell, Zeno], me atrevo a agregar ésta: En Sumatra, alguien quiere doctorarse de adivino. El brujo examinador le pregunta si será reprobado o si pasará. El candidato responde que será reprobado ... Ya se presente la infinita continuación.

These versions are all based on the mathematical paradox of the set of all sets which would then have to include itself. The same paradoxical logic operates in the Book of Books, of 'La biblioteca de Babel', the absolute book, which would necessarily, but impossibly, have to include itself.

Russell's and Borges' own formulations of the paradox are variations on

Gödel's Second Incompleteness Theorem which poses the following question: is it possible for a human being to be in a position in which s/he cannot believe that s/he is consistent without in the process losing his/her consistency? Any consistent mathematical system must suffer from the limitation that it can never prove its own consistency. Their consistency is only known by methods that cannot be formalized in the systems themselves. Ever since this discovery of the mathematician and logician Kurt Gödel of the undecidability of some mathematical problems, mathematics had to question its claim to being a pure or complete science, thus giving up all hope of answering questions concerning matters of worldly fact and experience by scientific means.

Paradoxes of the Zenoan type can thus be seen as a kind of prose translation of more abstract problems, transferred from the mathematical system to the realm of human experience and to their belief system by means of symbolic logic. It seems that Borges, too, in his unrelenting urge to argue the validity of existential theories as to the nature of this world, touched on the very contemporary problem of 'possible worlds' (as espoused by Saul Kripke) in which different sets of logic can be semantically interpreted in terms of possible worlds (as opposed to our 'real' world) with different kinds of relationships between the worlds, raising questions of identity, names and referents. Kripke, following Leibniz (see his notion of the best of all possible worlds) in this branch of mathematical philosophy called modal logic, makes the crucial distinction between true as a 'matter of facts' and of 'necessarily' true. This constitutes what became to be known as possible world semantics. As an example, it only happens to be true as a matter of fact that there are nine planets in our solar system, but it is perfectly conceivable that there could have been more or less than nine planets, in this or any other possible world. However, it is not only true but necessarily true that two and two makes four, since there are no possible circumstances or worlds in which two and two is not four. For Borges the problem remains to decide on which is the 'right' kind of logic based on the 'right' kind of causal laws, 'magic' or 'natural' for this our world?

The paradox, thus defined, is a perpetrator of infinity. But it is also a means of challenging one set of logic by putting forward another logic, valid yet counter-

intuitive. Let us recall that 'the derived contradiction may be contrary to reason, but it is also derived according to reason' (Honderich 1995, 642). In the late 1920s with 'La duración del infierno', Borges had put infinity forward as synonymous with the nightmare of perpetuity.

In the two essays on the paradox, 'La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga' (1929) and 'Avatares de la tortuga' (1939/52 in *Discusión*), the paradox reveals the concept of infinity (which Barrenechea had drawn attention to when she speaks of the repulsion and at the same time the attraction which the concept of infinity holds for Borges). Infinity, in the guise of the paradox, threatens the artifice of the dream reality:

Nosotros (la indivisa divinidad que opera en nosotros) hemos soñado el mundo. Lo hemos soñado resistente, misterioso, visible, ubicuo en el espacio y firme en el tiempo; pero hemos consentido en su arquitectura tenues y eternos intersticios de sinrazón para saber que es falso.

(*'Avatares de la tortuga'*, p.136)

Infinity is equated with the infinite regression or progression, the breaking down of the continuum of time into an ever-spiralling abyss of individually measured instances in time; symbols of which are the nightmare of waking into another dream ('La duración del infierno') and which Borges is to develop in some of his most noted *ficciones* (in the guise of the prison, the cell, etc.), where he is also to put forward immortality as a manifestation of infinity, of perpetuity.

Juxtaposed, yet inextricably linked to the notion of eternity is thus the Borgesian concern with the paradox. It can be argued that the paradox, proposing perpetuity without the Divine, is, on a deeper level still, a metaphor for the perpetual, unrelieved tension between Borges' sense of the nothingness of his self, and the desire to be contained in an Absolute. This tension is what I term woundedness. In other words: infinity - that which the paradox is concerned with, that which it perpetrates, and also that which is its crux - is a pointer to Borges' metaphor.

1929-1931: Cabbala and Gnosticism

Borges' interest in the 1920s and 1930s in Gnosticism and Cabbalistic wisdom attests to his interest in spiritual wisdom and notions of heresy, an interest which is to continue through the 1940s ('La flor de Coleridge' (1945 in *La Nación*, later in *Otras Inquisiciones*) 1950s ('Del culto de los libros', 1951, also the essay and the poem respectively: 'El Golem' I and II, 1957/58), 1970 ('La cábala', 1977), and into the 1980s ('El Simurgh y el águila', in *Nueve ensayos dantescos*, 1982), where Borges continues to explore concerns which he, for first time, raises in 'Una vindicación de la Cábala' and in 'Una vindicación del falso Basílides'. In this chronological delineation, Borges can be seen to gravitate towards mysticism.

In these early essays on the Cabbala and on gnosticism, Borges' emphasis is on the nature of God. Linked to the nature of the Divine is the theme of knowledge of Supreme God, and of salvation through the spiritual enlightenment of the elect. The theme of the elect runs in Borges, even though neither he himself (through the essays) nor his characters (in his stories) seems to be amongst the elect. The significance of Cabbalistic wisdom to Borges is that it introduces the notion of an Absolute Being and of mystical knowledge; the notion of a sacred text, and also of an absolute text; that it allows for multiple readings and hidden meanings. Historically, from the Cabbala the Gnostic reading evolved (see also 'La cábala', 1977, p.128, 131). And in relation to his stories, the notion of the Golem, the Cabbalistic being fashioned from inferior material is crucial to many of Borges' stories ('Las ruinas circulares', 'La escritura del Dios'). The Cabbala is, according to Room (1999):

A Jewish mystical system of theology and metaphysics [...]. Its aim was to relate the finite and the infinite, which was brought about by emanations from the Absolute Being. Passages from the Old Testament were treated as symbolic, and interpretation was based on the significance of numbers. The most important Cabbalistic work is the *Zohar*, written in the 13th century but based on older material.

Stockum (1967) refers to the Cabbala as a system of pre-Christian wisdom and revelation (p.24), with God at the centre of the world (p.16). Because the soul is lost in individuation, alienation from God occurs (p.18). Salvation can be found in the renunciation of all that is worldly, and especially of self-will (p.19) in favour of serenity (*Gelassenheit*) (p.20). Alazraki (1988, (140-141) points out Borges' rejection

of Idealism and relates an interview with Borges in 1971, where Borges says of his motivation to study the Cabbala (p.6)¹⁴:

Since I have not been able to believe in a personal God, the idea of a vast and impersonal God, the *En-Sof* of the Kabbalah, has always fascinated me.

Borges seems fascinated by mystical knowledge, but misses out on, yet longs for, actual experience or faith.

‘Una vindicación de la Cábala’ raises the question of identity. This is pertinent to the issue of plurality and the Trinity, a subject which much perturbs Borges. For him, the Trinity is a monstrous construct of which he only speaks in terms of horror. In ‘Notas’ (p.177) he had mentioned the Trinity in the same breath as the Chimera, a Chinese zoological monster, geometrical figures, and the synchronisation of voices. For Borges, the Trinity implies multiplicity and hence loss of identity. His aversion lies in the fact that notions of multiplicity deny or at least reduce individuality or even identity. But how can we then reconcile our conclusion with his claim that the abominable nature of the Trinity is comparable to ‘espejos contrarios’ (‘Una vindicación de la Cábala’, p.56), i.e. mirrors that reduce instead of multiply?¹⁵

When Borges speaks of the Trinity, it is with abomination (though he does not discuss the Trinity in ‘La cábala’ of 1977, which otherwise adheres very much to the format of the 1931 version ‘la vindicación de la Cábala’). Borges’ treatment of the Trinity furthermore displays a marked emphasis on the Son (p.56):

¹⁴ For Alazraki’s discussion of the Simurgh see Alazraki 1988, 44; and on reader participation which makes the reader a Cabbalist see p.50. For his discussion of ‘El Golem’ see p.4; the legend of the Golem p.19-20; of Meyrinck p.20; of ‘Las ruinas circulares’, p.20-24; of ‘El Zahir’ p.45. See also see Monegal (1981, note 21) on ‘Tres versiones de Judas’, ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’, ‘Del culto de los libros’ (1951) and compare to ‘La Cábala’ (in *Siete noches*); reference also to ‘Yo Judío’ (1934): mock tracing of Jewish ancestry following Nazi allegation.

¹⁵ If it is the splitting up of one identity into several ‘bodies’ that Borges objects to, then this last claim makes sense: multiplying the bodies or containers actually reduces identity. This is what happens when the original voice of an actor is dubbed with that of another person, invisible and unidentifiable: the act of combining two voices reduces or even effaces their inherent characteristics by divorcing the image from the voice, an act of dualistic nature. This very argument, i.e. extension (or generalization) with or without losing singularity, can also be applied to Borges’ discussion of the universality yet nationality of Argentina, and of the plurality of Walt Whitman: Whitman does not split himself up into all men and readers when he becomes every one of them but encompasses, rather than merges with, them in the Platonic manner: the individual in Whitman becomes the archetypal man who manifests himself in every man. And so what at first appeared an objection to the act of multiplying turns out to be an objection to the act of reduction.

Imaginada de golpe, su concepción de un padre, un hijo y un espectro, articulados en un solo organismo, parece un caso de teratología intelectual, una deformación que sólo el horror de una pesadilla pudo parir.

On the one hand Borges appears disturbed at the notion of the Trinity, and on the other he seems to be unwilling to reconcile himself to the non-Divine, accidental role played by Jesus - the Son - once the Trinity is renounced:

Entendemos que renunciar a la Trinidad - a la Dualidad, por lo menos - es hacer de Jesús un delegado ocasional del Señor, un incidente de la historia, no el auditor imperecedero, continuo, de nuestra devoción.

Las tres inextricables personas importan un horror intelectual, una infinitud ahogada, especiosa, como de contrarios espejos.

(‘Una vindicación de la Cábala’, p.56-57)

This is reminiscent of Borges’ aversion to Berkeley’s God as a kind of epoxy in ‘La encrucijada’.

Borges makes reference also to the Koran as one of the attributes of Allah, and as preceding the language in which it was written (p.56), an issue he is to develop further in the 1977 version ‘La Cábala’. The impenetrable, infinite, absolute nature of the Scripture is, incidentally, the very justification for a haphazard approach to its deciphering (‘Una vindicación de la Cábala’, p.60). Borges’ texts are not so much a vindication of the book, but of the reading techniques (p.55) and of its hermeneutic value. The Jewish reading of the Cabbala includes vertical reading, reading from the bottom to the top, the substitution of some letters of the alphabet by others, the summing up of the numeric value of letters. In Borges’ interpretation, then, the absolute text is coded and does not require nor benefit from any logically accessible reading technique; it requires an approach which Borges calls *absurdo*.

The same technique, i.e. a chaotic method to discover a hidden order or meaning, is applied to the ‘La biblioteca de Babel’. Reading, and consequently the writing of fiction, is thus a quest similar to that of philosophy: what distinguishes literary from non-literary texts is their fictionality, and it is the fictional element that also pervades much of philosophy. Neither fiction nor philosophy are constrained by the factual but propose ideas as if they were ‘real’ possibilities and then experiment

with the exposition of consequences. Both enact thought experiments that start out by asking: what would happen if ...? to explore what is conceivable. The rest is hypothetical: if A is the case then so is B or C. Fiction and philosophy both engage in a game of argumentation in which it is difficult to decide if the initial premises are ever fulfilled.

Borges comments that, since the Scriptures are held to have been dictated by the Holy Spirit ('Una vindicación de la cábala' p.56 and 58), it is thus rendered a sacred Text, 'un texto absoluto, donde la colaboración del azar es calculable en cero.'(p.59)¹⁶. This refers back to the '*página de perfección*' of 'La supersticiosa ética del lector' of 1930, p.48; and also of 'La Cábala' of 1977. Borges' preoccupation and fascination with chance and contingency (rather: his fascination with, perhaps even his desire for the absence of chance and contingency) which he is later to translate into 'Tres versiones de Judas'. Borges discusses the notion of an absolute in writing. The absolute does not allow for any interference of chance ('Una vindicación de la Cábala', p.59), and the absence of chance is what characterizes the Scripture since it is dictated by God who knows all possible and all impossible acts. The absence of chance means perfect order, and God is all-purposive albeit nonsensical and impossible; hence there is no human, man-made text which could ever lay claim to these Divine qualities.

With 'Una vindicación del falso Basílides', Borges introduces Gnosticism and thus re-enforces his concerns for the theme of revelation, of knowledge, the notion of the elect, and the notion of a Supreme God, an Absolute Being who is juxtaposed against the demiurge(s), i.e. the lesser being(s). He finds in gnosticism a notion of an inferior god, the demiurge, who pervades our world and our existence, and who contrasts with the notion of a Supreme God, who is longed for yet elusive. The demiurge is, according to Room (1999):

In the philosophy of Plato, the mysterious agent that made the world and all that it contains. Among the gnostics, the Demiurg is also creator of the universe, but a being that is subordinate to the Supreme Being.

Another kind of demiurge is Abraxas (Room 1999):

¹⁶ For later references to the sacred text see Borges' 'La cábala' of 1977, p.126, 129, 131.

A word used by the Gnostics to personify a deity, the source of 365 emanations. This figure is not only the number of days in the year but the sum of the numbers represented but the word's Greek letters [...]. The word itself is perhaps of Cabbalistic origin and is said to derive from Hebrew [...] 'hide the four' (meaning God, and alluring to the Tetragrammaton [...]).

The significance and the attraction of gnosticism to Borges is manifold. In the first instance, it offers a notion of knowledge which is seen to be the key to salvation, a kind of knowledge, however, which goes beyond normal intellectual understanding (Harris 1999, p. 3-4)¹⁷:

Gnosis is not discursive, analytical or abstract knowledge but 'insight' into reality that is beyond the reach of normal intellectual understanding

Room 1999:

Various sects, mainly of Christian inspiration, which arose and flourished in the 2nd century [...]. The name derives from the Greek word *gnosis*, 'knowledge', but it was usually used by the Gnostics in the sense of 'revelation', which gave them certain mystic knowledge of salvation that others did not possess. It was essentially based on oriental *Dualism*, [¹⁸] the existence of two worlds, good and evil, the Divine and the material. The body was regarded as the enemy of spiritual life. In most Gnostic systems there were seven world-creating powers, in a few their place was taken by one *Demiurge*. *Christ* was the final and perfect *Aeon*. [¹⁹] The Gnostic movement caused the Christian church to develop its organization and doctrinal discipline.

Harris (1999, 3, 2, 3-4, 5, 38, and 143 respectively):

Gnosticism is an established part of our Western culture, and, as well as engaging in religious and philosophical dimension, we have a considerable interest in it as a formidable system of thought that came near to presenting an intellectual and spiritual alternative to apostolic Christianity. It developed its own distinctive ideology by concentrating on the 'higher' *gnosis* as a condition of achieving salvation.

¹⁷ See Harris (1999) on the notion of Godhead (p.89); on Basilides (p.142-145); on creation and cosmology (p.38, 108-110, 111); on man and the origin of man (p.104).

¹⁸ For a definition of Dualism see Room (1999):

A system of philosophy that refers all things that exist to two ultimate principles, such as Descartes' Thought [...] and Extension [...], or, in the theological sense, good and evil. In modern philosophy it is opposed to *Monism* and insists that creator and creation, mind and body, are distinct entities.

Dualism is thus juxtaposed to Monism (Room 1999):

The doctrine of the oneness of mind and matter that explains everything in terms of a single reality, ignoring all that is supernatural; otherwise any one of the philosophical theories that denies the *dualism* of mind and matter and seeks to deduce all the varied spiritual and physical phenomena from a single principle.

¹⁹ For the following definition of Aeon see Room (1999):

An age of the universe, an infinite length of time. Also the personification of an age, a god or any being or thing that is eternal.

At the heart of *gnosis* there is mystery, the mystery of the Divine secretive purpose for the world, the unfathomable mystery that is the essence of divinity. The gnostics conceived of the mystery in metaphysical and theosophical terms, as one whose veil is only penetrated by those who are spiritually 'mature' and able to receive the revealing *gnosis*. This is the 'higher' knowledge that elevates the spirit through enlightenment into the nature of God and his purpose. The theme of election, prevalent in Judaism and orthodox Christianity, flourished amongst the gnostics, who believed in an elect elite who were capable of receiving special knowledge that pointed the way to perfect fulfilment.

Gnosis is not discursive, analytical or abstract knowledge but 'insight' into reality that is beyond the reach of normal intellectual understanding. Its sphere is the transcendent realm that is unpervaded by intellect alone, the realm of mystery and the otherwise 'unknowable'. [...] Thus each new insight stimulated progression to the ultimate goal of existence, that is, union with God, the Supreme Being, and 'seeing' the reality of everything that emanates [...].

Gnosticism may be used of a form of redemptive knowledge which is expressed through a complex speculative religious and philosophical movement. Its central core is a mysterious *gnosis* conveyed to a spiritual elite who are equipped to comprehend its origin, nature and purpose.

In the gnostic system the Supreme God is the head of the hierarchy and below him is the *demiurge*, who created the world, and below him again are the lesser powers. Here the *demiurge* is one of the lesser angels who is identified with the God of the Jews.

The creation of the world and human life is the work of the God of the Jews, who is leader of the lowest class of angels. In this context he is known as Abraxas. It is from him and his works that deliverance is required.

'Una vindicación del falso Basírides' (*Discusión*, 1931) further elaborates on the cosmology of the gnostics (p.61 - 63), a theme Borges re-iterates in 'La cábala' of 1977. He speaks of the gnostic God as inhabiting the 'inconcebible museo de los arquetipos platónicos' (p.62), which echoes Borges' comment on Platonic Archetypes in the prologue of 1952 to 'Historia de la eternidad'. Borges calls the Supreme God 'un Dios inmutable' (p.62) (but: calls 'el inmóvil dios Abraxas', p.64), again to be echoed in 'La cábala' from whom proceed the lesser divinities, the least of whom being the God of the Scriptures. He elaborates on the origin of man: shadows, darkness, and vague memories all speak of the lesser god (p.63). This shows our origin as a mere aside, a chance occurrence; it also shows man's supreme insignificance (p.65).

Borges addresses the problem of evil (p.64): the gnostics removed the Supreme God from the creation and from any notion of personal responsibility for evil and suffering by interpolating the lesser divinities (also in 'La cábala'). Most importantly, Borges concludes that there can be no greater gift for the Supreme God

than being absolved of the world which we, insignificantly, inhabit (p.66). God is thus absolved, excused and ultimately not responsible for his creation.

The notion of an evil God emerges, a notion which Borges is to translate into his fictions. Harris (1999, 108-109):

The gnostics conceived of the creator and ruler of the world as other than the Supreme God. He is called the *demiurge* and to him the gnostics attributed the creation of the natural world and all its components. [...] The *demiurge* (architect) is described as an angel, like God, whose abode is the seventh heaven of the heavens that surround the earth. Above this is the eighth heaven, the abode of the Supreme God, who is completely remote from the world. [...] The angel of the lowest sphere (the *demiurge*) is designated as the creator of the world. Behind the *demiurge* there is a coterie of subordinate powers (*archons*) who were his collaborators. The world is therefore the creation of lesser powers beneath the Supreme God, the purpose being, in the gnostic sense, the separation of God from material evil and establishing a spatial distance between him and the material world. The lesser *archons*, being directed by the *demiurge* whose creation includes psychic as well as material things, keep the material world in the power of evil and thus the *demiurge* is conceived of as a hostile being. The *demiurge* and the *archons* constitute an anti-Divine force against the Supreme God and the spiritual forces. They represent the demonic forces that hold people captive. [...] The ruling *archon* [is] 'the accursed god of the Jews, who makes rain and thunder. He is the Demiurge of this world, the god of Moses described in his creation narrative.

Gnosticism also gives an account for the existence, and the origin of evil (Harris 1999, 106-107). Evil means materialism, suffering, terror, pain and confusion, being without direction:

The world is evil because matter is evil. [...] [Man's] own physical body is the root of evil. [The *demiurge*] was responsible for evil and keeps man in subjection to it. [...] The gnostics expanded the [use of the term for evil] to include torment, grief, sickness and suffering.

Basíledes differentiates between the Jesus that died on the cross, and the Jesus that - guided by his knowledge of the divinities' secret names - penetrated their spheres unseen and ascended to the highest of the seven heavens (p.63, see also Aeon). And just as Jesus ascended unrecognized, so the gnostics will ascend. Jesus, however, overcomes his 'lesser' origin (i.e. Son of God of Bible, and as such the son of a lesser god).

The notion of our being fashioned from inferior material by an inferior god, i.e. the *demiurge*, is worked into another essay, and a poem: in 1958 as a poem 'El Golem' (in *El otro, el mismo*), and in 1957 as an essay 'El Golem' (in *Manual de*

zoología fantástica). In those versions, unlike the rabbi, the dreamer, most cruelly so, becomes self-conscious of the condition of his being dreamed up by another dreamer (as does the dreamer in 'Las ruinas circulares').

1934: Nietzsche and the Eternal Return

The focus is now on Borges' discussion and modification of two philosophers which he is to single out in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' as underlying his own approach: Leibniz and Nietzsche. And we shall see how the paradox becomes instrumental in uncovering the falseness of the dream²⁰. Borges' critique of Nietzsche's Eternal Return is first formulated in 'La doctrina de los ciclos' of 1934.

The adaptation of, and variance from, Nietzsche's Eternal Return of the Same, together with his application of the Leibnizean Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles, lead Borges to re-affirm his conclusion, expressed in the early essays of the 1920s, that the concepts of time and self are null and void. This logic, furnished and supported by his intellectual mind, is, however, in constant conflict with the limitations of the very intellect that gives rise to the refutation of time and self, and which does not allow for the actual experience, or living, of the very claims (as to the non-existence of time and identity) it puts forward. In other words: the notions of reality, time and self, albeit illusory, are nonetheless inescapable in that, as they constitute, and are necessary for our apprehension of this world of experience, of representation. What Borges is thus left with is a sense of teleological futility and of nothingness.

It can be argued that Borges thus came to conclude that neither ideas, theories, philosophy, nor indeed the intellect, can provide answers or order to our existence. And the release from all intellectual tensions, the mystical experience of the eternal moment, is only fleeting, albeit all-powerful and yearned for. And so, as this chapter will show, Borges turns to writing fictions in an attempt to establish art, or writing as

²⁰ For an analysis of the dream in Borges' writing see Arana (1994, 57-64) and Nuño (1986, Part 9, and p. 115-118, and 120).

his *ersatz*, often without clearly demarcating the line between essay and *ficción*, in a blurring of genre that has been commented on, and appreciated by, readers and critics alike (see Agassi 1970; Nuño 1986; Arana 1994; and Genette 1977).

In 'Historia de la eternidad' (p.11), Borges puts eternity forward as: 'La eternidad, un juego o una fatigada esperanza', but one which holds the promise of overcoming the loneliness of individuation by uniting the separate parts in the womb that originated them, into the whole of the eternal Form²¹. A promise echoing Schopenhauer's appreciation of art as transcending ordinary consciousness. Nietzsche objects to this very projection of the here and now, of time, into a transcendental endlessness. It impedes the total affirmation of life by conceiving of eternity (the Christian eternity) as linearly taking over from time which is an outsider to the eternal, and, after the death of God, forever an exile from it. The notions of a God and of eternity, he argues, reduced time to a mere apparition, to a state apart from the 'real' irreconcilable gulf between time and eternity.

In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1961), the death of God is pronounced with nonchalance in a mere subordinate sentence by Zarathustra as he descends from the mountain and encounters the saintly hermit who had dedicated himself to a life of retreat from mankind in prayer and praise of a non-existing God. Yet, God's death had filled Nietzsche with great horror, for it meant the disappearance of meaning from the sentiment of life and pointed the way to nihilism²². The death of God meant the end to the 'ideality' of a life beyond this existence, and left only two options: banality and rationality in the moral and spiritual decline; or a new ideality creating man-made ideals of the here and now. These two options are manifest in the *Letzte Mensch* (the Last Man or Nihilist), and the *Übermensch* (the Overman), a placeholder for the aim of human aspiration towards greatness. It is the great task of the *Übermensch* to renounce all dreams and hopes of a Beyond, and to embrace this life on earth. This

²¹ I refer to Borges' quote in 'Historia de la eternidad' (p.35):

Aquel terrible pasaje de Lucrecio sobre la falacia del coito which concludes: del todo en vano, ya que no alcanzan a perderse en el otro ni a ser un mismo ser'

to which Borges adds: 'los arquetipos y la eternidad - dos palabras - prometen posesiones más firmes'.

²² 'A nihilist', wrote Nietzsche in *The Will to Power*, 'is a person who says of the world as it is, that it better were not, and, with regard to the world as it should be, that it does not and cannot exist' (quoted in Heller 1988, 180).

colossal effort is necessitated by, yet in turn necessitates the death of God through the discovery of the will to power. The will to power is the creative force of the here and now, intent on overcoming the notion of an eternity beyond time, thus reinstating time as the real dimension of all being. Now there are no limits other than those imposed by this earth.

The will to power tends towards the future, still open and possible; it cannot will, only affirm, the past. Thus it is anchored in the flow of time, willing ever higher states of existence. But can man continue to overcome himself, endlessly in time? In the face of infinite time, what Nietzsche calls the *Schwere* (the greatest weight or burden), all sense of greatness is diminished. Or is there a deeper knowledge of time, where the past can become future again? Zarathustra draws some very unusual conclusions from the infinity of the past and the future: if 'behind' the present there is a past eternity (what Borges calls in 'La Doctrina' 'la eternidad anterior', p.87), then everything that can move must have moved down the same lane already; in other words: everything that can happen must have happened, there can be nothing outstanding: a past eternity cannot be incomplete. If we accept the notion of a past and a future eternity, we must conceive of either as the whole eternity, a whole of all possible time - twice?

At this point, the hour of utmost silence, the *stillste Stunde*, Zarathustra dares to think the unthinkable: the Eternal Recurrence (of the same - *des Gleichen*)²³. A cry: a snake had crept down a shepherd's throat. The thought of the eternal recurrence, in the allegory of the snake, is loathing nausea: if everything returns, then each petty state of existence, endless repetitions of all frustrations, losses and imperfections, must be lived again; everything that had been overcome, must be overcome again. More than ever before, the will to power, the will to overcome oneself, seems weighed down by the burden of eternity. But: 'Bite off her head!' Zarathustra calls out to the shepherd, and so he does. The transformation is remarkable: the shepherd laughs, such as he had never laughed before. He had dared to think, and survived thinking through

²³ As Wood pointed out (1991, 385), care should be taken not to get confounded by the two terms used by Nietzsche himself in a rather indiscriminate manner, i.e. '*eternal return*' ('Ewige Wiederkunft'), and '*eternal recurrence*' ('Ewige Wiederkehr'). It might be tempting to use the two expressions in order to mark a distinction between 'return' as the return of people and things, and 'recurrence' as the repetition of events. However, such a systematic use cannot be found in Nietzsche, although he does not seem to favour the version of re-runs.

the unthinkable, all weight is now lightness, and he recognizes that with every recurring moment of frustration, there is also the promise of that tremendous moment when we say 'I want to live again'. Affirming the eternal recurrence calls for the total affirmation of this life by postulating that it be willed to be relived over and over again. Only the *Übermensch* can survive, can live, can actually demand the glory and the gloom of the eternal recurrence²⁴.

It can be argued that thinking the eternal recurrence is eternalizing temporality. Time is made eternal, transitoriness is permanent, the singular is repetitive: Nietzsche's eternity is in this world, it is the world. This is how Nietzsche can solve the dilemma posed by the notion of repetition. For we ask: how can the unique, the very present act of e.g. asking a question be repeated in all its aspects? Yes, we may utter the same question again, in the same wording and tone of voice; but not with the same sounds that we produced the first time round. Any repetition is a copy, is not the one before. This conviction is grounded in the successive nature of enumeration, which presupposes time on a linear basis. To Nietzsche, however, the eternal recurrence is 'the being of becoming' (cited in Wood 1991, 28), thus overcoming the stasis that had paralysed the thinking of Parmenides: becoming, i.e. change, is the one thing that never changes, and hence embodies permanence, the hallmark of being. Heidegger remarked upon this (in his *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*, cited in Wood 1991, 32):

He [Nietzsche] thinks Being as Time itself, as Eternity which is not a static Now, nor a sequence of Nows rolling into the infinite, but as the now that 'bends back into itself': this [Eternity] is the concealed essence of Time ... the most difficult thought of philosophy means to think Being as Time.

The notion of repetition or recurrence of the same introduces an intriguing metaphysical problem, that of sameness and identity. It is central to Borges' personal experience in 'Sentirse en muerte' (1928); to his critical approach to the eternal recurrence in 'La doctrina de los ciclos' (1934) and 'El tiempo circular' (1943); and to

²⁴ It is important to bear in mind that Nietzsche's Doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence is firmly anchored within and should not be considered outwith his four major thoughts: *Übermensch*, the death of God, the will to power, and the flow of time. They are linked in such a way that the causal chain can easily be reversed, since each element is at once cause and effect of the other.

his explicit acknowledgement to philosophical doctrines in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo'. It is also at the heart of debates concerned with the philosophy of mind. This relates to the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. Leibniz maintained that if two things were alike in absolutely all respects without there being any differentiating features between them at all, then they were not two things but just one and the same thing. If thus they are qualitatively identical, they are numerically identical as well. See Honderich (1995, both 390):

The doctrine of the identity of indiscernibles has various formulations, ranging from a trivially true version to the metaphysically weighty version employed by Leibniz. Here is a trivially true version: for any individuals x and y , if for any property f , x has f if and only if y has f , then x is identical with y . Let the property f be the property of being identical with y . Surely y has it. But, then, if x has every property y has, then x has it also. Hence, x is identical with y . Here is Leibniz' version: for any individuals x and y , if for any intrinsic, non-relational property f , x has f if and only if y has f , then x is identical with y . Thus, according to Leibniz' version, if x and y are distinct individuals, they cannot differ simply with respect to extrinsic, relational properties; they must differ with respect to some intrinsic, non-relational property as well. Clearly, the exact content of Leibniz version of the identity of indiscernibles turns on how we understand the notion of an intrinsic, non-relational property.

The word 'same' is used sometimes to indicate similarity (*qualitative sameness*), as in 'Rachel is the same age as Tony, and the same height as last year', sometimes to indicate that what is named twice should be counted once (*numerical sameness*), as in 'The morning star and the evening star are the same planet'. The word 'identical' can also have the former sense (identical twins, identical dresses) as well as the latter; hence philosophers are liable to discuss both kinds of sameness under the label 'identity'.

Let us take the example of the planet Venus which, depending on whether observation took place in the morning or at night, had long been conceived of as two different planets, referred to as the 'morning star' or 'evening star' respectively. Complication arises once the question of meaning or content is raised: the two expressions do not mean the same, whereas they do refer to the same object²⁸. The matter becomes even more complicated once we introduce mental and physical 'qualities' or 'properties', essential and non-essential, as the criterion for differentiation (Honderich 1995, 390)²⁹:

²⁸ The contemporary discussion (espoused in Solomon 1993, Chapter 7 and in Lucas 1973, §25) is between the Identity Theorist J.J.C. Smart, and his opponent J. Shaffer.

²⁹ There is an intuitive concern here: we approach identity as from the objects' point of view (whereby the object can be a thought process, a physicality, or a person); whereas we might equally approach identity as from the perceiver's point of view. This is exemplified in Borges' willingness to attribute identity to two identical processes, viewed as from the object: 'no acabo de entender cómo dos procesos idénticos dejan de aglomerarse en uno' ('La doctrina de los ciclos', p.89), and in his reluctance to do

Leibniz' thesis of the identity (i.e. numerical identity) of indiscernibles (i.e. qualitative identicals) states that no two things can be exactly the same in every way, sharing all their qualities. This is disputable, but becomes a tautology if numerical-identity-with-*a* is allowed to count among the qualities of *a*. The converse thesis (often called Leibniz' law), that things differing in quality must be two, is hard to doubt. But it must be interpreted in such a way as to banish change, since *a* can have some quality that *b* used to lack, and still be numerically the same as *b*: many things persist through change. Hume thought that in the 'proper' sense identity over time requires changelessness. That would be true if the proper sense of identity were exact qualitative identity; but in fact the numerical sense is no less proper, merely different.

There are implications for plurality when Borges wonders whether two identical moments in the minds of two or more individuals are one and the same moment and thus refute time. The question is whether qualitatively identical things can be numerically distinct. This does not matter for the monists who believe in only one fundamental entity. However, the problem becomes acute for pluralists, who hold that there are many, numerically distinct things, and must either make them out to be all qualitatively distinct, or else find something else to avoid the full force of Leibnizean Identity of Indiscernibles. In 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', Borges seems to me to adopt a monist stance.

If, as Shaw argues, there is no plurality (of identical yet numerically different moments or experiences), then catastrophes are but a single sorrow, illusorily multiplied in the many mirrors of more than one individual experiencing the same suffering. Borges agrees with Shaw that what one person suffers is the maximum that can be suffered on earth. It accords with his claims that the part is no less numerous than the whole (*Discusión*), that he rejects the whole to exalt each one of the parts ('Nueva refutación del tiempo, B'). And it accords with his Idealistic conviction which denies the world its substance, thus leaving only a system of experience to which the principle of identity can then be applied. Substance had been denied to material things by Berkeley; to minds by Hume; to space by both Berkeley and Hume;

just that when viewed as from the perceiver: we can postulate in the mind of one or two or more individuals two identical moments. Are those identical moments the same ... and confound the series of time? ('Nueva refutación del tiempo'). The issue intimated here by Borges in a very tentative manner raise a number of complexities, by postulating or refuting the identity of brain processes and thoughts.

and to time by Borges. Agassi (1970, 290-293) on time and identity and on Borges' criticism of the British empiricists idealism:

Borges says that he assumes the principle of the identity of indiscernibles. This is true, strictly speaking. Is it, perhaps, a principle that the British idealists would reject? Will this, perhaps, invalidate Borges' criticism? I think not. I think the British idealists assume, and have to assume, the principle of identity of indiscernibles though, admittedly, they need not stress it overmuch. What they speak of is experience, and the identity they assume is the identity of experiences, not of things. Once you allow the multiplication of one experience at will, the Occam's razor is blunted and the strongest case for British idealism is given up. Assume, however, the identity of indiscernibles. Assume also, with Berkeley and Hume (pace Chesterton and Borges), that our stock of possible experiences in all their combinations is finite. (Berkeley and Hume clearly declare all experienceable space, geometrical, colour, sound, etc., to consist of a finite set of discrete segments. And so, it seems, did even Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*.) It follows that quite possibly (and in the long run certainly) simultaneous with my present experience here, there is an identical experience elsewhere. We need not fear, however, that these two have to be considered identical; they belong not only to different parts of the geometer's space (which the idealist denies the existence of) but even to different parts of experienced space which, we remember, is mapped into the geometer's space. And so the idealist and the geometer will come up with the same result - to the idealist's delight.

[...]

And so idealism ends up with loops, both in space and time. [...] Subsequently one must reject one's sense of identity as illusory. And so the British idealists' programme of leaving the world of experience as it is fails and the world all of a sudden is experienced as an eerie place. End of argument.

What has gone wrong here? Borges himself is an idealist of the same school as Schopenhauer and Schrödinger. [...] What he finds otiose in the British empiricists idealism is not its being idealistic but its being so reassuring, common-sense, flat. (This incidentally is what he, following Shaw, views as the most eerie and unreal thing - hell indeed.) What he rejects in British empiricism most strongly is not so much that it flattens the universe, but, and more deeply, that it denies the existence of a limitation on reason; not so much that it identifies the knowable with the observable, but, and more deeply, that it identifies the knowable with what there is. Borges himself is not all too aware of his own message: the world is not, in principle, fully knowable. He is no less aware of lacunae and difficulties in his own philosophy. Destroy all sense of identity, and the sense of self-identity, perhaps even of responsibility, is gone as well.

[... there follows an exposition of Schrödinger and Borges ...]

The aim of Borges is to impart to his reader the sense of the mystery of the world, a sense of skeptical reverence, akin to Einstein's 'cosmic religious feelings'. [...] There is, I think, a strong philosophic reason in Borges' dual theme of the mystery of time and of blurred identity: like Schrödinger he feels that we need a theory which will account for our sense of multiplicity of things, even will ground them in reality, yet will deny, in the last resort, the existence of more than one final entity. Borges, thus, is more intent on raising a problem, albeit from a given philosophical (Schopenhauerian) viewpoint, rather than advocate his philosophy.

[...]

Clearly the only promising suggestion, thus far, is that there are levels of identity. This solution, Schrödinger claims, is Schopenhauerian.

Nietzsche rejects the view that the world develops in a linear manner, proceeding towards a pre-established final goal; the will to power does not aim at a final state. In this respect, he had departed from Schopenhauer who held that animals are determined by a purposive will³⁴. But like Nietzsche's animals, Schopenhauer's live in the timeless zone of the perpetual present unmarred by notions of memory and death (p.19). In his moment of truth in 'Sentirse en muerte', Borges lives the affirmation of what he had previously conceded only reluctantly: 'la primacía de la especie y la casi perfecta nulidad de los individuos' (p.18). For a brief moment he has entered the timelessness of the Eternal Return, he has become animal by feeling animal ('sentí por él [pájaro] un cariño chico, y de tamaño de pájaro'), he is no longer the singular Borges but the whole and thereby immortal.

Borges' critique of Nietzsche

The ambivalence of the desire to be absorbed in a greater union than can be provided by the individual bound within the successive nature of time, is evident in Borges' approach to Nietzsche's Eternal Return in both 'La doctrina de los ciclos' and later, in 1943, in 'El tiempo circular'. The former displays an almost painful effort to refute Nietzsche on all planes natural-scientific and mathematical before finally admitting to its psychological and idealistic-philosophical validity. 'El tiempo circular', written nine years later, focuses no longer on possible (or, as we will see, rather impossible) refutations, but on three different modes of interpreting the doctrine, Platonic, Nietzschean, and personal.

As a main line of his critique of Nietzsche, Borges starts out by seemingly presenting Nietzsche's position (p.75):

³⁴ However, Borges goes on to argue that, although we accept the Form in matters other than our individual case, we do not accept the full impact of it when it comes to our individuality threatened by becoming absorbed into the gigantic uniformity of Human kind (p.20).

Esa doctrina que su más reciente inventor llama del Eterno Retorno que es formulable así: El número de todos los átomos que componen el mundo es, aunque desmesurado, y sólo capaz como tal de un número finito ... de permutaciones.

Set in italics, this appears to be a direct quotation from a Nietzschean atomic explanation for the Eternal Return, which Borges then dismantles in order to prove the extreme unlikeliness of such repetition based on the finiteness of atoms in infinite time. This first refutation, supported by the vast number of atoms and the even vaster number of possible combinations, is followed by a the recourse to Cantor's sets: the infinity of number of points in the universe, or even in a fraction of the universe renders the part no less numerous than the whole; there are hence an infinite number of terms and thus of combinations, and no need for a recurrence for want of variation. Cantor's definition of the set of 1874 is as follows: 'A set is a totality of certain definite, distinguishable objects of our intuition or thought, called the elements of the set.' It was doomed to failure, however, due to their being based on the use of undefined synonyms, such as 'collection', and leading to logical inconsistencies, such as have been uncovered by Russell's paradox in 1901 concerning the set of all sets that do not contain themselves as members: the condition for it to contain itself is that it should not contain itself. Mathematicians soon came to regard the notion of a set an undefined, primitive concept (Howson 1972).

Borges' refutation of Nietzsche's Eternal Return is fourfold. Firstly, the physical refutation, Borges later in the same essay, admits that Nietzsche 'tampoco habló - y eso merece destacarse también - de la finitud de los átomos'. 'Nietzsche 'niega [Borges' emphasis] los átomos; la atomística no le parecía otra cosa que un modelo del mundo, hecho exclusivamente para los ojos y para el entendimiento aritmético' (p.86). So that what appeared to be a direct quote of an allegedly Nietzschean atomic proof for the Eternal Return, turns out to be an erroneous attribution of authorship; formulated not by Nietzsche, but by Borges. Does he thus refute his own attempt at refuting Nietzsche? Secondly, this time algebraic, Borges uses Cantor's definition which, at the time of writing, had long been disproved by Russell whose work Borges quotes in the essay's bibliography and whose familiarity with the paradox is well documented (eg. 'Notas' in *Discusión*, 'La biblioteca de Babilonia', etc).

The third refutation is of a theological kind. Augustine rejects the Stoic and Pythagorean precursors of the Eternal Return which speak of perpetual change, endlessly moving towards no goal. Does this historical evidence invalidate Nietzsche's prophetic message of a new revelation? Borges does not think so. He argues that Nietzsche's 'ignorance' of his precursors is a stylistic means to give it theological credibility: a prophetic revelation does not admit footnotes nor other references. This would explain what otherwise would appear a contradiction of Nietzsche's own proclaimed 'perspectivism' in which all interpretations are acceptable; in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he elevates the text to a quasi-biblical status, to an unquestionable repository of profound truths. In a later essay, 'El propósito de Zarathustra' (*La Nación*, 1944, quoted in Rukser 1962, 191) Borges argues that what Nietzsche wanted to create with the book was a holy text, and himself as its founder or apostle; fully conscious of the precursors, these would help confirm the new religion. The psychological-literary affirmation of the Eternal Return as a religion shows, more obviously than in the other two instances, how Borges first attempts to refute, only to then affirm the doctrine, consciously or subconsciously so.

And lastly, Borges' fourth refutation is of a mnemonic kind: 'el recuerdo importaría una novedad que es la negación de la tesis' (p.86). Memory points at succession rather than repetition since knowledge of the same having happened before brings with it a different awareness every time the cycle is completed; it would induce the individual to act differently. This reasoning, however correctly applied to a man like Funes, does not apply in general. Borges does not take into consideration oblivion as a major trait of human kind, which incidentally had not been overlooked by Nietzsche himself. Before Freud, Nietzsche spoke of forgetting as an activity of the mind, screening and preventing us from remembering what would upset our equilibrium. Successful repression buries experience in the 'inarticulate' which is the subconscious. Nietzsche insists on the vital contradictoriness of life, and on logic as stifling this fullness of life. Art, he insists, is the only 'articulation' in which this contradictoriness is kept intact. Forgetting is the source and indispensable condition

for the Eternal Return and for transforming the identity of the person to whom it appears³⁷.

The above discussion of Borges' *Eternidad Anterior* showed how Nietzsche, far from reaching Augustine's and Borges' conclusion of the *regressus in infinitum* and therefore of a Creator, had led him to formulate the Eternal Return as eternalized temporality. But Borges then turns to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, as had Nietzsche, and concludes from the irreversibility of transforming light into heat that 'esa comprobación ... anula el "laberinto circular" del Eterno Retorno' (p.88). Unlike Borges, however, Nietzsche, in *The Will to Power*, concludes from the same law that, since the world has not reached the final and most likely state of equilibrium of energy, it cannot be supposed to move towards such a state as required by a mechanistic theory.

It might be helpful at this stage to briefly turn to this most vital of physical laws which also serves to lend a direction to time³⁸. The Second Law of Thermodynamics was formulated in 1850 by Clausius. It states that all processes are wasteful, and some of the energy available for a process will be squandered. This waste, which can no longer be usefully employed, is measured as an increase in a quantity called entropy, i.e. useless energy, which always goes in the irreversible direction of increased entropy and thus disorder. We can imagine a finished jigsaw in its carton; this initial state of order is the indispensable condition for the ensuing disorder: once we shake the box, the jigsaw disintegrates into a different order, a disorder. Some fragments of the picture will still be recognizable, but the more often we give the box a shake, the more disintegrated the picture is likely to become. And we will have noticed, yet never questioned why, that when we mix our bath while sitting in it, we hardly ever experience our feet freezing while our head is boiling: hot and cold water luckily mix into the disorderly state of warm³⁹. The irreversibility of

³⁷ On memory and oblivion see Heller in *The Importance of Nietzsche* (1988, 177), and Allison's *The New Nietzsche* (1977, 108).

³⁸ For an excellent discussion of time and thermodynamics see Peacock 1989.

increased entropy or disorder is often said to correspond to the unchanging time arrow. Time and entropy are held to advance together, since every process on which our lives depends results in entropy increase: we proceed in one direction and therefore age. Entropy is thus equated with the time arrow pointing from the past to the present to the future⁴⁰. From the fact that the universe's entropy is remorselessly increasing and tending towards a maximum, Nietzsche concludes that it cannot move towards such a state since it should have reached it by now. Borges' paints the full scenario: 'una vez alcanzado el máximo de entropía ... el universo entero ... estará tibio y muerto' ('La doctrina de los ciclos', p.88)⁴¹.

Nietzsche refuted both the mechanistic and the thermodynamic approach to determine the universe and does not lay any claim to any of the two in order to support his doctrine, yet Borges quotes him as if Nietzsche had tried to do exactly that; how easy a task then to prove Nietzsche wrong. Borges' 'flawed' approach in re-stating Nietzsche is an indicator, I feel, of the painful oscillation in Borges between the emotional comfort of an Eternal Return, and the intellectual realization of the futility of any such hope.

In the era of modern physics, possibility and probability reign above absolute truths. From determinism - which disposed of God on the ground that effects no longer needed suprahuman causal explanations - to the new physics which took shape in Borges' lifetime, there does not seem to be a place for God. But as Max Planck categorically stated, a statement reiterated by many contemporary natural scientists: 'Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature'. It cannot prove nor disprove the

³⁹ This is Grünbaum's famous example of entropy increase, quoted in McCall *A Model of the Universe* (1994).

⁴⁰ However, it should be pointed out that according to the Boltzmann paradox, increased entropy certainly serves to distinguish one temporal direction from the other, yet does not indicate which is *the* direction of time.

⁴¹ This scenario of a change from ever-increasing to ever-decreasing entropy is feasible when we imagine that the source of our energy, the Sun, is switched off. Heat on earth decreases down to a maximum entropy level, and life ceases to be. There is no longer an 'arrow' of entropy, and hence no 'arrow' of time. Implosion, the Big Crunch, incurs in which all laws of nature are broken down, including the Second Law of Thermodynamics: it cannot prevail since that would demand a time arrow where there is no time. The only word we have for a domain without the Second Law, without decay, nor increase in disorder is Eternity. The only eternity so far as a consequence of natural events.

existence of a God, since scientific theories come and go. Reconciliation can only be found in the recognition that immediate efficient causes can be determined mechanistically, whereas ultimate, final causes point to a Divine Power.

This is the task which Borges set out to accomplish: his non-fiction stories, and his artistic essays attempt to unite science, philosophy, and ultimately theology in their quest for truth by proceeding from the How in order to find an answer to the Why. This is a task set against a personality torn between the beauty and the torment of these conjectures.

CHAPTER III 1936 - 1953

In the year 1936 Borges can be seen to make a significant shift in his exploration of the notions of time and of self. He introduces the notion of eternity into the debate, and the link between time and individuation, and also the link between eternity and union can be delineated through these explorations. Borges, however, does not make these links consciously, and so the duality and thus the ultimately irreconcilable tensions between time and eternity, between the individuated self and the self which is in communion with a higher self, remain. These tensions could be resolved by a mystical union if only Borges had actual experience of what he longs for, a longing which he expresses both intellectually and emotionally. The texts of this period in his life reveal an intuition of, an empathy with a Divine existence which he does yet not experience. These texts also speak of his desire for, and the frustration at the lack of spiritual fulfilment.

In the mid to late 1930s, the time also of writing many of his most noted fictions, Borges seeks new ways of satisfying his yearning for transcending the limitations of the mind, and, along with the mind, the abhorred yet inescapable notions of time and identity. To that effect, it is vital to now turn again briefly to Schopenhauer, as Borges had done throughout his creative life both in affirmation of, and also in open opposition to his favorite philosopher. The divergence from Schopenhauer, as well as from Berkeley, is, in my view, most notable in Borges' essays, although Sierra (1997) sees a direct reflection of Schopenhauer's philosophy in his fictional work too. To that effect, Sierra points to Schopenhauer's aesthetics of art, which allows for the transcendence of selfhood and temporality, as a marked influence on Borges, although Agassi claims that Borges raises philosophical problems from Schopenhauer's viewpoint rather than actually putting forward Schopenhauer's philosophy. This view conflicts with that of Lorenz (1975) who holds that Schopenhauer underlies both Borges' own worldview as well as that of his fiction. Arana (1994) goes further still and places Borges' fictions above philosophies, since they are free of the constraints of matching theory to reality and thus more at ease to propose realities of the 'as if'.

To Schopenhauer, true aesthetic experience is an intense form of knowledge and reveals reality as selfless, objective, subject-independent, timeless and changeless: a 'timeless reality that is not carved up into individuals' (Janaway 1997, 286). Aesthetic experience reveals, and possibly even unites the individual with the timeless and undivided Idea. The supreme quality of music in particular reveals the unity with God in a quasi-mystical transcendence. For a succinct account of Schopenhauer's aesthetics in the work of Borges see Sierra (1997, 27):

La experiencia estética se define, entonces, como una transformación que permite al sujeto experimentar la visión de una realidad trascendente. En ella se produce: la pérdida de la individualidad; la cancelación del tiempo y del espacio; la percepción de la Idea.

1936 Time, Eternity, God, and Soul

With 'Historia de la eternidad', Borges shifts his discussion of time further¹. Where in the early 1920s he had flatly denied the concept of time and had already, in the late 1920s moved towards an exploration of notions of infinity, he can now be seen to tentatively introduce, although not fully fledged, the differentiation between time on the one hand, and eternity on the other. In 'Historia' he discovers, discusses and intellectualises eternity and discusses at great lengths both Gnostic (p.24), and the Church's (Bishop Irenaeus') conception of eternity (p.145), which has implications for the notion of the Trinity. He also discusses, and rejects Platonic Forms. In the prologue of 1953 to 'Historia de la eternidad' (1936), Borges speaks of his changing vision of archetypes: whereas in 1936 he saw them as *piezas inmóviles de museo*, in 1953 he recognizes their nature as *poderosas, vivas*, thus acknowledging that they are indeed an underlying reality.

In his discussion of eternity, an attribute of the Divine, God is omitted: After having chronologically enumerated the various concepts of eternity - which he argues, rather than refutes - Borges puts forward his own notion of eternity, borne out of a personal experience beyond reason:

Es una pobre eternidad ya sin Dios, y aun sin otro poseedor y sin arquetipos. (p.37)

¹ See also Nuño (1986, 114-115).

Although he denies Platonic Forms and eternity intellectually, Borges does choose to conclude this essay with 'Sentirse en muerte', the text which gives his personal account of a moment of eternity.

Borges introduces the theme of the part as partaking in the whole: 'cada cosa es todas las cosas' (p.15) and re-iterates his solipsistic question:

Si el tiempo es un proceso mental, ¿cómo lo pueden compartir miles de hombres, o aun dos hombres distintos?

(p.130)

He holds that personal identity entails memory (p.35), and argues that without this there is no intelligence. This is a stance which he is to fictionalize in 'Funes el memorioso' (1942); the same correlation operates between *la historia universal* and eternity: eternity is to the world (or history) what memory is to identity. Borges concludes 'Sentirse en muerte' by resigning himself to the inescapability of the intellect:

El tiempo, fácilmente refutable en lo sensitivo, no lo es también en lo intelectual, de cuya esencia parece inseparable el concepto de sucesión.

(p.41)

This is actually contradictory to what he says in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', where it is the logic of his intellect which denies time and identity vs. the inescapability of time, reality, and identity (*and yet, and yet ...*).

Much of Borges' argument in 'Historia de la eternidad' is centred around the notion of Platonic Forms, and much of Borges' unresolved contradictions - detectable upon close analysis of his own debate - can, I would argue, be attributed to the neglect to distinguish between Aristotle's and Plato's respective notions of Forms. The Platonic-Aristotelian debate concerning F(f)orms revolves around the distinction between Platonic Forms (or Ideas), which are transcendental, and Aristotelian forms, which are immanent, a debate which Borges takes up again with 'Avatares de la tortuga'². See Honderich on the Archetype (1995, 288):

² For a discussion of Platonic Forms in 'Las ruinas circulares' see Nuño 1986, Part 5, as well as 104, 114-115, and 138.

The Greek word means the look of a thing, but it was commonly extended to mean a sort, kind, or type of thing. [...] What is called Plato's Theory of Forms (or Ideas) is a theory about sorts, kinds, or types, and its main claim is that a type exists independently of whether or not there are things of that type.

Aristotelian (Matter and) Forms are defined in the following way (Urmson and Rée 1989, 25):

Aristotle distinguishes as separate aspects of [an object, eg. a table] its matter [wood, metal, etc] and its form (how it is put together, its structure). [...] Form is immanent: the form of table exists only as the form of this table or that table, that is of the form of certain matter. There is no separately existing transcendental Platonic Form of Table (or indeed of Man or Justice).

The crucial difference between Plato and Aristotle is the question of an entity existing independently of its concrete manifestation, which also raises the question of how this affects time. Borges introduces Plotinus into his discussion of the concept of eternity. For Plotinus, the third century AD philosopher who founded the Neoplatonic School, time is perceived of as a copy, an image modelled on the archetype of eternity. The archetypes or Ideas of the Platonic Heaven (the ultimate reality for Plato) are recognisable in our world as individual things through the human intellect and the immortal soul which already know what they appear to learn. This 'theory of recollection' (Solomon 1988, 277) provides the common ground for individual experiences.

Borges' initial classification of Platonic Ideas as monstrously immobile (*inmóviles piezas de museo*, 'Historia de la eternidad', p.9, 16; an assertion he also makes in 'Una vindicación del falso Basílides' of 1929, p.62) can be attributed to his conclusion that since the Idea (and hence the image) is unchanging, so also is it motionless. But although for Plato Ideas do not change, the individual things in our world do change in time. This is possible because the common universal Ideas could be separated from particular things which are thus subject to different laws. Where Borges stumbled, is in the fusion of the strictly Platonic with the Aristotelian variant which rejects the notion of Forms (forms in Aristotle) as existing independently of the individual thing. Aristotle still agreed with Plato, though, on the unchanging nature of underlying forms. How, then, do individual things change while their form (which according to Aristotle does not exist independently) remains unchanging? The answer lies in the introduction of 'substance', which gave rise to an ongoing, fertile

philosophical debate, surrounding body and soul, mind and matter, and which also infected Borges in his concern for identity and the underlying reality of phenomena. An individual thing remains constant despite the fact that it changes and has different properties (or accidents) at different times, because its essence (that aspect which identifies the individual as a particular individual) cannot change.

For Aristotle, the individual thing is substance, is reality, and consists of matter. Both matter and its underlying form are unchanging; what can change, however, is the way they combine, and although substance and form cannot exist separately they can be distinguished through the various combinations they undergo. In this way, Aristotle can avoid the unacceptable notion of immobility and changelessness of both Form and individual thing (which his predecessors such as Parmenides upheld) while still holding on to underlying realities.

The step Borges had to take was to recognize the changelessness of eternal F/forms and of individual things in their 'essence', but not necessarily in their idiosyncratic makeup. It is in the recognition of the combinatory value of form and matter that, in 1953, he could reconcile his rejection in 1936 of F/forms on the basis of them being riddled by 'mezcla y variedad' instead of being pure and single (p.21). In typically understated manner, and twenty-seven years on, in the 1953 'Prólogo' to a new edition of *Historia de la eternidad*, Borges is to admit his error and acknowledges a significant shift in his philosophical outlook and his concession to Platonism (also in 'La metáfora', 1952)³:

No sé cómo pude comparar a 'inmóviles piezas de museo' las formas de Platón y cómo no sentí, leyendo a Erígena y a Schopenhauer, que ellas son vivas, poderosas y orgánicas.

('Prólogo', *Historia de la eternidad*, p.9)

Borges acknowledges his debt to Schopenhauer, who had introduced him to the transcendental powers of art. From his general theory of art Borges learned that Idealization brings out the essential and significant features of the individual object

³ Whether he came to embrace it in its full significance remains open to debate: the recognition that the generic, the universal can be aesthetically superior to the concrete without minimizing the impact that the individual holds. What seems to trouble Borges is having to attribute a higher value to the generic while at the same time he can be seen to be at pains to accord the individual its place as originator of that value.

rather than shifting the emphasis to the archetypal model. Schopenhauer realized that the artist in each one of us is blessed with the ability to transcend ordinary consciousness, (which is marked by egocentricity, interestedness, pain and anxiety, the manipulation of the perceptual content by the will⁴), and to reach aesthetic consciousness, which is not marred by any of the above, due to the artist losing him/herself in the object of perception and no longer separating the perceiver from the perceived: they have become one. Perception becomes disinterested and truly 'objective' by losing its painful character. We thus reach a painless state in which art, like philosophy, does not mirror nature but truth⁵, a state in which art redeems life. This may be the root of the tension in Borges between art and truth: truth lays claim to reality⁶, and reality in the materialistic world is tied to the concept of time.

This is a vision which echoes Schopenhauer's appreciation of art as transcending ordinary consciousness, although Nietzsche, whose doctrine of the Eternal Return Borges had discussed in 'La doctrina de los ciclos' in 1934, and which he was to take up again in 1943 with 'El tiempo circular', is to introduce objects to this very projection of the here and now, of time, into a transcendental endlessness. It impedes the total affirmation of life by conceiving of eternity (as conceived by Christian doctrine) as linearly taking over from time which is an outsider to the eternal, and, after the death of God, forever an exile from it. The notions of a God and of eternity reduced time to a mere apparition, to a state apart from the 'real'.

The refutation of time, as only vaguely suggested in the prologue - *entendí que sin tiempo no hay movimiento ... tampoco puede haber inmovilidad* - points to the Idealistic approach which Borges adopts later in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' 1944 and 'La metáfora' of 1952. Without consulting the former, however, we cannot fully understand how the latter is meant to modify Borges' views in *Historia de la eternidad*. 'La metáfora' concludes that there are only a limited number of affinities

⁴ In Biological Idealism, the will is understood as survival mechanism of the brain which presents the world in a useful, rather than truthful, manner.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of art in philosophy see Young 1992.

⁶ A tension, incidentally, which is reconciled in Nietzsche who believes that art makes the unbearable bearable. Nietzsche believes that it is in art alone that logic and the fundamental contradictoriness in life can be reconciled; that art embodies life's resistance to a purely rational order; that it affirms, even in its portrayal of evil, human existence on earth. As such, Nietzsche saw the poet, the artist, as very close to the thinker whose strength lays in making the existing life 'thinkable'.

which one can discover between life's essential things, *afinidades íntimas, necesarias*. This confirms Borges' philosophical intuition ('El tiempo circular', p.97) that 'el número de percepciones, de emociones, de pensamientos, de vicitudes humanas, es limitado, y que antes de la muerte lo agotaremos', i.e. that the number of authentic experiences we may have is small, a view which leads him to the partial acceptance of the Eternal Recurrence. It is a conviction to be reiterated in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', the keyword being 'experience' which points to Idealism. Bradley's notion of time as a matter of relation between events (Urmson and Rée 1989, 53) is a view which Borges introduces under Bradley's name in 'Historia de la eternidad', and under the Buddhists' name in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo'. Time as a matter of relation between events has later come to be termed the 'static view of time' (Seddon 1987). Events are ordered by the relation 'earlier than/later than' and do not cease to be future in order to become present, nor do they move in time, since time is a relation only between intemporal things. These relations are transient and asymmetric (A is earlier than B, but B is not earlier than A).

This view opposes the notion of time as flowing, in whichever direction. This is the notion most stubbornly ingrained in our mode of perception, not least of all due to our conditioning through language. This dynamic view of time can be divided into two major branches: the 'transient dynamic' view and the 'tensed dynamic view'. The former holds that events move through time by them passing us, or by us passing the events; we are either on the shore of that river of events, or we are on the river moving past the events on the shore. Time is thus fully dynamic in that temporal motion is an objective fact about reality, and in that events really do change with respect to being past, present, or future. Flux and change are thus the main features. Transient dynamic views of time deny that events really move but still hold that they change with respect to being past, present, or future. This denies flux or motion, but admits change. These dynamic modes are partially grounded in persisting linguistic images in which time flows, rushes, flies, stands still, moves forward, etc. Borges admits, in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', echoing 'Sentirse', that it is in the very nature of language to be successive and thereby temporal, and hence a totally ineffective tool for reasoning the eternal, the intemporal.

The flux of time is also supported by our own intuitive sense of time which is that of a passage from aspiration to achievement, from potentiality to actuality, from uncertainty to knowledge, thus insinuating a flow from a present to an open future, with memory of the (fixed) past to ensure and preserve knowledge. This 'direction' of memory is seen as the determining psychological factor for the perception of time as from the past into the future (Lucas 1973). In 'La otra muerte' (1949), Borges fictionalizes a then revolutionary model of the universe, the so-called 'Branching Past Model'⁷ which allows for two historically incompatible accounts of the past to be equally correct by abandoning the principle of the past's uniqueness. This story might have been inspired by Borges' reference to God's omniscience of all there is and might be and might have been, inspiring an added extra to the doctrine which was later rejected:

La omnisciencia [...] importaba el conocimiento de todas las cosas, vale decir, no sólo de las reales, sino de las posibles también [...] los modos potenciales del verbo pudieron ingresar en la eternidad [...]. Su eternidad combinatoria es mucho más copiosa que el universo.

('Historia de la eternidad', p.31-32)

This is what Borges objects to most in Platonic Eternity, its lack of variety and plenitude, the limited vision of 'una eternidad que es más pobre que el mundo' (p.23).

There are thus three identifiable anchors for the flux and direction of time: language, psychology, and memory, and in his discussion of the Eternal Recurrence, Borges adds a fourth one in the guise of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

The uniqueness of reality, the conviction that there is only one correct view of reality, is the touchstone for truth in absolutists such as Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes. Kant, too, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, proves by way of his 'transcendental deduction' that although we ourselves supply the rules for our experience, constitute our world, and determine what can be true for us, we do not have any choice because our intellect cannot go beyond that which we postulate. This is Kant's elaborate attempt to prove that there is only one set of categories (basic rules

⁷ Branching toward the past occurs when, relative to any instantaneous state of the universe, there are a number of alternative past states from which that state might have come (see McCall 1994).

or a priori concepts) which all rational beings must use when constituting their experience (cited in Solomon 1993, 296).

The Platonic-absolutist conception of time and the nature of the universe is based on the intelligibility of the world, on the belief that language and thought (or word: *logos*) are accurate vehicles for recognizing and representing an intelligible reality. For Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes there exist necessary truths. This reveals their conviction in the teleology of the universe: Aristotle's cosmology operates for a purpose and can be explained according to certain goals.

The teleological view which supported Aristotle's Prime Mover and St Augustine's Creator, suffered great losses in the age of Newtonian mechanics which paved the way for a deterministic approach to science and to the universe: each action, each effect could be explained by way of referring it to a natural cause, and there no longer seemed to be a need for a Creator. Teleology, which received a further blow when Einstein raised the problem of the intelligibility of the universe, had finally to be abandoned altogether when Max Planck, in Borges' life time, developed his quantum physics which removed all certainty from a hitherto deterministic world. Effects no longer needed causes, least of all a Creator; uncertainty, chance, and probability now reigned supreme. Quantum mechanics revealed that particles no longer occupied well defined positions and speed and that it was no longer possible to predict one but many possible outcomes as to a particle's place and speed at any one time (see Hawking 1988, 78). The underlying 'why' of the universe as opposed to a mere 'how' raises the question whether this can, after all, reconcile science with the notion of a God.

The absolutist, also called 'Newtonian' conception of time and space was finally defeated by Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (STR)⁸. STR claims that there exists no absolute, global way of dividing events into past, present, and future: if two observers are in motion relative to each other, each is entitled to draw

⁸ Newton did not believe in what he himself had discovered because it did not accord with his belief in an absolute God: the proof that there was no unique standard of rest or position which was to refute the absoluteness of space. Einstein later concluded the same as to the absoluteness of time.

his own 'now' line, which is the line linking all events which have the same time co-ordinate in his frame of reference. Since the 'now'-lines of the two observers differ, the classes of events they regard as 'future' differ. There is hence no unique, global simultaneity constituting 'now'. The flow of time is not in the world itself, but in the mind of the observer. This 'relational' ('Leibnizean' or 'reductionist') conception lent irrefutable arguments to those who regard time as being mind-dependent, anthropomorphic, subjective and psychological since all propositions about time would be false in a world devoid of conscious beings.

This thesis of the total mind-dependence of time, in turn, has been extended to a notion of relative truth: if absolute truth lays claim to reality, and reality is determined by time, then the relational conception of time destroys the absoluteness of both reality and truth - and art can claim to mirror truth, whatever truth and whose-so-ever truth. In fact it is Nietzsche who argues (in *Human All Too Human*, cited in Solomon 1993, 270) that since there are no facts, but only interpretations, there are as many equally 'true' or 'false' (it makes no difference) world-views as there are creative people, whom he encourages to adopt, as a matter of experiment, as many different world-views as possible. This is taken up by Borges when he wonders: 'si el tiempo es un proceso mental, ¿cómo lo pueden compartir miles de hombres, o aun dos hombres distintos?'. Plato, Berkeley, and Schopenhauer have all found an answer: in the archetype; the supranatural mind of God; and the will respectively.

Borges comments on the Church's eternity, what he calls '*la segunda eternidad*' - necessitated by the principle of predestination and reprobation, and manifest in the simultaneous creation of the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. When Borges speaks about '*la Eternidad Anterior*' ('*La doctrina de los ciclos*', p.87) he refers to the notion of a beginning of the universe in time, which had been rendered meaningless both by Kant's and Nietzsche's view since this presumed the past eternity of time regardless of a beginning or not of the universe.

Augustine, too, had provided an answer by conceiving of time as a quality of the universe created by God and which did not exist previously. Time and creation came into existence simultaneously. This is only so in the static universe which has

either existed eternally, or which was created and continues to be the same unchangingly. In such a static universe, the beginning of time must have been caused by an otherworldly force or God since there are no physical necessities. This was the universe known until the discovery in 1929 of galaxies moving away from us. The notion of an expanding universe had to be accepted, and the Big Bang Theory was formulated. The universe is thus known to be continuously expanding from a state of infinitesimal size and density, a state in which all laws of nature are dispensed of. Previous times are thereby not defined (Hawking 1995, 67).

In 'Historia de la eternidad', Borges leads the reader through the history of eternity, from Aristotle's perfect circles and lights which determined his cosmology, to Einstein and the Big Bang theory, which he witnessed as a contemporary. He directs the reader's attention to the rift between the Church and science, a rift that can be traced back to Galilei. Borges also points to the fact that scientific dogmas have shaped notions of the physical universe, and with it our conception of time, truth, and reality, in the most contradictory ways possible: as absolute or relative.

He calls eternity 'un juego o una fatigada esperanza' ('Historia de la eternidad', p.11). But it is a concept which holds the promise of overcoming the loneliness of individuation by uniting the separate parts in a safe (Divine) place, a symbolic womb that originated them, into the whole of the eternal Form.

1936 Gnosticism and Sufism

The Tension between Immanence and Transcendence

References and evidence of Borges' enduring preoccupation with Gnosticism and Sufism, particularly between the late 1920s and early 1950s, can be found in 'La flor de Coleridge' of 1945 which illustrates Borges' pantheistic slant on mysticism and notions of spirituality. It is also evidenced in 'Nota sobre Walt Whitman' of 1947; 'El Simurgh y el águila' of 1948 and 'El coloquio de los pájaros', and in 'Los avatares de la tortuga' of 1939.

With 'El acercamiento a Almotásim' of 1936 and the secondary text contained within, 'El coloquio de los pájaros' - a mystical Sufi text by Fariduddin Attar - Borges branches out towards an apprehension of a notion of God by writing texts which have mystical undercurrents. The themes introduced in this period of time are those of salvation, knowledge, faith, enlightenment, and G(g)od. Borges' focus, however, remains Gnostic. It also displays, as the following distinction will show, pantheistic tendencies.

This text can be seen as central to the tension between pantheism and mysticism which is the focus of Borges' texts of the 1940s. The tension in Borges is between immanent and transcendent union with whole, which displays the continuing duality of time and eternity on the one hand, and accidental and essential self on the other; a duality which in Borges' texts is neither reconciled nor transcended.

Pantheism, also described as 'a non-theistic concept of deity' (Levine 1994, 641) is the identification of the material universe with a Divinity. According to Honderich (1995, 641):

The term 'pantheist' designates one who holds both that everything there is constitutes a unity and that this unity is Divine. Pantheists thus deny the radical distinction between God and creatures drawn in monotheistic religions.

Mysticism, by contrast, is a theistic concept. See the Christian mystics, such as Silesius, who hold that (Flitch 1932, 88):

Nature is but a medium which imperfectly transmits the light of the Divine reality. Things are real only in as far as they exist in God, and so far as they are not in God their existence is illusory. It is when they claim reality for themselves that they are most unreal. The assertion of a self, the exercise of selfwill, is an act by which the creature alienates itself from God and cuts loose from the root of Being.

Yet pantheism, though non-transcendental, is not atheistic (Levine 1994, 2-3 and 3 respectively):

With some exceptions, pantheism is non-theistic, but it is not atheistic. It is a form of non-theistic monotheism, or non-personal theism. It is the belief in one God, a God identical to the all-inclusive unity, but it does not believe God is a person or anything like a person.

Pantheists deny God's ontological transcendence. The Divine Unity is radically immanent in the world.

'El acercamiento a Almotásim' is an interesting text in that, although Borges never did write a novel, in this story he turns to writing a review about a (fictitious) novel; in fact, his review is of two versions of a manuscript, both versions, of 1932 and 1934 respectively, fragmented and the 1932 version (the one the Borges-narrator holds superior) lost altogether. The time of writing this text, is crucial, as it coincides with the writing of 'Historia de la eternidad', where he also chooses to include a text which had been written and published earlier, 'Sentirse en muerte'. The year 1936 can thus be seen as a turning point in the way Borges approaches themes which had, and were to preoccupy him for the rest of his creative writing period.

This text of 1936 features as an essay in *Historia de la eternidad* as 'Dos notas', and as a story in *Ficciones: El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. The main story revolves around the two versions of the one book which proposes the quest by an unnamed student for a Divine Being who casts its shadow onto other, lesser beings.

The narrator is the writer and editor and reconstructs the story from two versions of a manuscript of 1932 and 1934 respectively and offers conjectures and possible interpretations as to the nature of the God searched for; the cross-references to Guedalla (p.37), Plotinus (p.45), etc are means by which the narrator can be identified as a 'Borges of sorts'. The third person narrator of the manuscript in turn is, again, a Borges character as he voices issues pertinent to Borges himself, such as the 'principio de identidad' (p.45). His main contribution, however, is his conjectures as to the nature of the God searched for. The two versions bear the titles *The Conversation with the Man Called Al-Mu'tasim: A Game with Shifting Mirrors* for the later version of 1934, and the earlier, unobtainable and superior version of 1932 is entitled *The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim*. They serve as a vehicle for the narrator's 'teología extravagante' (p.43), which is the suggestion that g/God, who might possibly be identical to the searching student, may in fact be in search of another God and so on ad infinitum, forever unconcluded.

This invalidates the notion of a singular, omnipotent and omnipresent God altogether. It foregrounds also what can be seen as Borges' persistent quest for the

knowledge and the experience of God. The student in the story finds Almotásim, but the reader (Borges?) remains excluded.

The English titles of the two versions yield some insight into Borges' underlying approach: The first version of 1932, the one the narrator holds to be 'primitiva, superior' (p.38) is called *The Approach to Al-Mutasim*. An approach suggests the imminence, it suggests a threshold of revelation, of all which the seeker had been searching for. The 1934 version, in contrast, the one the narrator does have a copy of, is entitled *The Conversation with the Man Called Almotásim. A Game with Shifting Mirrors*. This version he holds to be inferior and unfortunate, and also its mystical undercurrents:

La novela decae en alegoría: Almotásim es emblema de Dios y los puntuales itinerarios del héroe son de algún modo los progresos del alma en el ascenso místico. ('El acercamiento a Almotásim', p.43)

The following conjecture is the one favoured by the Borges-character. It echoes a Gnostic view of a series of lesser and lesser divinities (demiurges) which rank inferior to the Supreme God of which only the elect receive *gnosis* and thus salvation:

No diré lo mismo de esta otra: la conjetura de que también el Todopoderoso está en busca de Alguien, y ese Alguien de Alguien superior (o simplemente imprescindible e igual) y así hasta el Fin - o mejor el Sinfin - del Tiempo, o en forma cíclica. ('El acercamiento a Almotásim', p.43)

The essay is, on the face of it, an account of the 'mystic's path', and indeed Alazraki (1988, 42) suggests that the narrator-Borges proposes an allegorical (i.e. mystical) reading; it reveals a pro-active God, a Gnostic God (a heretical concept which introduces layers upon layers, version upon versions of divinities) in need, in search of another, and that one of yet another, and so *ad infinitum* (see also Sosnowski 1976). But it is really two stories, two essays. The main story with its Gnostic visions of the Divine universe echoes concerns which Borges explores in his early essays such as 'La vindicación del falso Basílides' (1931), 'La cábala' (1929/31), and, decades later, in 'El Simurgh y el águila', etc., and which he now extends into the realm of fiction. But 'El acercamiento a Almotásim' also introduces another story with its own precursor. It is the allegorical tale of the birds who find that their long lost king of birds, the Simurg, is really each and every one of themselves. Although a

deeply mystical, God-inspired and God-inspiring text, Borges, in his rendering, gives it a pantheistic slant. This Persian tale by the Islamic mystic Farid'ud-din Attar features highly in Borges' writings over the decades, for a third time in 'El Simurgh y el águila' of 1982 (*Nueve ensayos dantescos*) where he comments in greater detail on the very same story, told in the same words he includes a mention in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo: the 'Nota al prólogo' (*Otras Inquisiciones*) in his comment on the Buddhist tale of Melandro's carriage.

The following is Borges' rendering of the allegory of the birds:

El remoto rey de los pájaros, el Simurg, deja caer en el centro de la China una pluma espléndida; los pájaros resuelven buscarlo, hartos de su antigua anarquía. Saben que el nombre de su rey quiere decir treinta pájaros; saben que su alcázar está en el Kaf, la montaña circular que rodea la tierra. Acometen la casi infinita aventura; superan siete valles, o mares; el nombre del penúltimo es Vértigo; el último se llama Aniquilación. Muchos peregrinos desertan; otros perecen. Treinta, purificados por los trabajos, pisan la montaña del Simurg. Lo contemplan al fin: perciben que ellos son el Simurg y que el Simurg es cada uno de ellos y todos. (También Plotino [...] declara una extensión paradisiaca del principio de la identidad: Todo, en el cielo inteligible, está en todas partes. Cualquier cosa es todas las cosas. [...] Para esta nota, he consultado el décimo tomo de las 1001 noches de Burton y la monografía *The Persian Mystics* [...]. Los contactos de ese poema [i.e. El coloquio de los pájaros] con la novela de Mir Bahadur Alí [...] pueden significar la identidad del buscado y del buscador; pueden también significar que éste influye en áquel. Otro capítulo insinúa que Almotásim es el 'hindu' que el estudiante cree haber matado. ('El acercamiento a Almotásim', p.45)

Compare Borges' rendering to Attar's (Idries 1964, 110). Attar's birds represent humanity; the seven valleys they traverse are stages in their mystical quest for union with the Divine: the first valley is the Valley of the Quest, where the pilgrim is challenged to face and to overcome perils. In the course of traversing the valley of the quest, the pilgrim denounces desires. The second valley is the Valley of Love: the pilgrim is consumed by a thirst for the beloved, symbolised by the rose, a thirst which is a symbolic criticism of the mystic who indulges in ecstatic experience and is out of touch with human life. The third valley is the Valley of Intuitive Knowledge: the pilgrim's heart receives directly the illumination of Truth and an experience of God. The fourth valley is the Valley of Detachment: the traveller becomes liberated from desires and dependencies. The fifth valley is the Valley of Unification: the seeker understands that what seemed to him different things and ideas are, in actuality, only one. The penultimate valley is the Valley of Astonishment: the traveller faces bewilderment and finds love. The last valley is the Valley of Death: 'The Seeker

understands the mystery, the paradox, of how an individual drop can be merged with an ocean, and still remain meaningful. He has found his “place” (Idries 1964, 110).

Borges focuses on the seventh stage, the Valley of Death, where the seeker merges with the whole. Yet Borges omits that in so reaching a communion with the God, the seeker does not lose his meaning (as an individual). There is a unity of individual selves in the Divine identity, yet this does not spell annihilation of the self, but rather a truer sense of individual self which has recognised its belonging, and submission to the Divine⁹. By contrast, in Borges’ rendering, the Simurg is part of the paradox of being self and yet the whole; Borges misses out the other stages, and most significantly, he misses out God; the tale, in his rendering, acquires a quality of Pantheistic immanence. Simurgh: the search of the many for the one reveals the identity of the searchers and the searched for: ‘I’ is ‘we’. This then ties in with Borges’ suggestion in the main tale that the searcher might be identical to the one he searches for. In ‘El Simurgh y el águila’ (*Nueve ensayos dantescos*, 1982), Borges comments that ‘detrás del mágico Simurgh está el panteísmo’.

<u>compare Dante’s eagle</u>	<u>and Borges’ Simurgh:</u>
the eagle is <i>inverosímil</i>	the Simurgh is impossible
the individuals which make up the eagle are not lost in it	the birds which see the Simurgh are themselves the Simurgh
speaks with one voice: ‘I’	‘I’ is ‘we’
the eagle is momentary	<i>‘el ubicuo Simurgh es inextricable’</i>
the eagle is the Jews’ personal God	<i>‘detrás del mágico Simurgh está el panteísmo’</i>

As Borges had declared that he found the belief in a personal God (theistic, transcendental) impossible, it can be argued that the attraction of pantheism to Borges is precisely in its non-theistic nature of the concept of an immanent deity. As such, the Pantheistic notion of Godhood is as impersonal as the God of the Cabbala, and so more accessible for Borges. The tension between mysticism and pantheism, between a personal, transcendental God on the one hand, and a pantheistic, impersonal deity on

⁹ For Islamic mysticism see Nicholson 1998.

the other, accounts for the tension in Borges' writing, and his thinking, between transcendence and immanence. This tension is also at the heart of identity. It holds between the 'I' (the individual self) and 'we' (Borges' conception of the Simurgh); between the mystical union of the individual with God, and the pantheistic union (or submergence) of the self with the many, the all. The personal salvation by a Christ figure is thus juxtaposed to the impersonal salvation which the pantheistic union in the Simurgh brings. This tension, and this fundamental ambiguity of conceiving of a Divine, can be seen to lie at the heart of a very pained personal outlook on spirituality.

1943 The Eternal Return Revisited

In 1943, Borges takes up the theme of 'La Doctrina' of 1934. He introduces his Idealistic alternative mode of interpreting the Eternal Return. Experience is at the heart of Borges' outlook, and his personal understanding of it is subject to considerable fluctuations during the course of his writing. In 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, A' of 1944, he formally introduces repetition without precision of identical moments, in which circumstantial variations do not impede identity. In 'El tiempo circular', he had already introduced the concept of 'partial identity' when he proclaimed his preferred mode of interpreting the Eternal recurrence: 'Arribo al tercer modo de interpretar las eternas repeticiones: [...] La concepción de ciclos similares, no idénticos' (p.94)¹⁰.

An analysis of Borges' Idealistic mode of interpreting the Eternal Return, in the more mature essay 'El Tiempo circular', will contribute to resolve his final uncertainty in 'La doctrina de los ciclos' of 1934 when he wonders: 'Aceptada la tesis de Zarathustra, no acabo de entender cómo dos procesos idénticos dejan de aglomerarse en uno'. Borges presents the first of the three major modes of interpreting the Eternal Return. Under the influence of the prevailing Platonic insistence that a circle was a

¹⁰ Partial identity results from the relational approach to identity, in which non-overlapping spatio-temporal properties are united to one and the same object by relations. This leaves open the possibility that they are distinct, but not wholly distinct; where properties overlap or where they stand as the part stands to the whole there is not total but merely partial identity. For further discussion see Armstrong 1980 in Inwagen 1980, 67-98.

perfect (ideal) shape, Aristotle's cosmology conceived of the earth as stationary (since we do not feel it moving) and of everything else, like the Sun, the Moon, and the planets revolving around it in a series of circular orbits¹¹. Motion should be circular, according to the Platonic ideal. Since man's destiny is determined by the stars, whose course is circular, that destiny in turn had to be circular and recurrent.

The sun and moon are 'perfect lights'; all bodies have 'natural' movement propelling them to a 'natural' place where they came to rest. On the earth, light objects move upwards, whereas heavy objects move downwards because that is where they find their natural place. And since heavenly bodies stay in the heavens, the heavens are their natural place. This is how Aristotle arrives at the unchanging and eternal nature of the universe (McCall 1994, 26). Aristotle's universe would never end nor had it ever begun. From this Aristotle derives the notion of the eternity of the universe and the recurrence of all things.

The second mode of interpreting the Eternal Return is Nietzschean, to which Borges applies the same logic as before by equating Nietzsche's 'forces' with atoms in order to demonstrate how a finite number of terms in infinite time cannot permute infinitely. He then calls in Russell's Identity approach to recurring events, implying that if they are identical in quality, they have to be identical in number; this is impossible in a world of linear time where repetition means succession. Again, Borges does not consider Nietzsche's concept of temporality in a thisworldly eternity.

The third mode of interpretation is that favoured by Borges himself in which the recurring cycles are not totally but only partially identical, a full discussion of which had already been provided in the chapter on Leibniz' Identity of Indiscernibles. The way in which Borges salvages the Eternal Return from the apparently irrefutable atomic-mathematical evidence, is by applying finiteness not to atoms or physical objects, but to experiences in what he later was to propose as 'repetition without

¹¹ The sun and moon are 'perfect lights'; all bodies have 'natural' movement propelling them to a 'natural' place where they came to rest. On the earth, light objects move upwards, whereas heavy objects move downwards because that is where they find their natural place. And since heavenly bodies stay in the heavens, the heavens are their natural place. This is how Aristotle arrives at the unchanging and eternal nature of the universe (McCall 1994, 26).

precision' ('Nueva refutación del tiempo'), i.e. the identity of variegated circumstantial experiences. He thus avoids the full impact of the Leibnizean principle; he refutes time by pointing to the Idealist conviction that time is a mere relation between intemporal events; and he puts forward the Eternal Return as the truly Nietzschean 'Being of Becoming' in the way that Heraclitus of Ephesus philosophized the world of perpetual change as endlessly repetitive cycles. The analogy of all human experience points not so much at a world without plurality, but to a world where every possible variation is firmly anchored as the part in the whole of experience already lived, be it by one individual or more.

Whereas Borges had simply argued against Nietzsche in 'La doctrina de los ciclos' (1934), he later, in 'El tiempo circular' (1943), offers a more differentiated discussion of the Eternal Return, i.e. the three modes of apprehending the doctrine. The three modes being Platonic; Nietzschean; and Borges' own version which fuses his belief in the absence of the subject with the Leibnizean Principle and the recurrence of all experience:

Ciclos similares, no idénticos [...] experiencias análogas.
(*'El tiempo circular'*, 1943)

Thus, recurrence is possible (if the cycles were really one and the same, there could be no recurrence) and he concludes:

Se repiten las tautologías de mi vida repetitiva sin precisión.
(*'El tiempo circular'*, 1943, p.243)

'El tiempo circular' concludes with a double outlook on the fixedness of life's experiences: the discomfort to our sense of individuality at the prospect of merely re-living, instead of creating our own lives; but also the comfort that nothing can deprive us from the huge, albeit limited, pool of life's ingredients. Although it has a political ring to it in the essay, it is also a statement about Borges' own tension¹². Thus Borges can dismiss the doctrine as intellectually unchallenging or even unacceptable, while at the same displaying an emotional bias for it.

¹² A tension which, as Young points out (1992, 7), Schopenhauer reconciled by recognizing the individuality of experience in the phenomenal world against the oneness of the underlying metaphysical reality beyond plurality.

1944/1946

The 1940s can be seen as a period of great tension for Borges between mysticism and pantheism, between faith and resignation. It is also the time when Borges branches out towards the notion of eternity as an alternative to the nothingness of time and individuated identity¹³. The first of the two versions of his essay 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' version A (*Otras Iquisiciones*) of 1944 contains also 'Sentirse en muerte'.

Borges is fascinated by the Leibnizean idea of the sameness (identity) of two processes ('La doctrina de los ciclos' 1934, 'Historia de la eternidad' 1936 (p.13), 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' ('A' p.243; 'B' p.253.)). In the decade spanning the years 1934 to 46, Borges expresses his fascination with Leibniz's doctrine that states that if two things were alike in absolutely all respects without there being any differentiating features (such as would be provided to any identical things, processes, thought, etc. by the time and space co-ordinates) between them, then they are not two things but one:

Dos argumentos me abocaron a esa refutación [del tiempo]: el idealismo de Berkeley, el principio de los indiscernibles, de Leibniz.

(*'Nueva refutación del tiempo A'*, 1944, p.237)

In 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', Borges develops his previous discussion of Leibniz further and introduces a notion which he had first formulated in the mid 1920s: he applies Berkeley's Idealism minus God, which he had expounded in 1925 in 'La encrucijada', where he took issue with Berkeley by denying that things (continue to) exist in the mind of God. Borges' philosophical outlook over the course of three decades can be delineated in a trajectory of thought, and of anguish:

Quiero mostrar dónde se esconde la falacia raigal de Berkeley [...]. Berkeley afirma: Sólo existen las cosas en cuanto se fija en ellas la mente [...]. Sí, pero sólo existe la mente como perceptiva y meditadora de cosas. De esta manera queda desbaratada, no sólo la unidad del mundo externo, sino la espiritual. El objeto caduca, y juntamente el sujeto. Ambos enormes substantivos, espíritu y materia, se desvanecen a un tiempo y la vida se vuelve un enmarañado tropel de situaciones de ánimo, un ensueño sin

¹³ See Nuño's comment (1986, 132) on 'Nueva refutación del tiempo':

Pero, además de ese presentismo, se deduce con 'rigor adamantino' la absoluta identidad de los instantes, esto es, la indiscernibilidad entre uno y otro.

soñador [...]. Lo que sí vuélvese humo son las grandes continuidades metafísicas: el yo, el espacio, el tiempo ...

(‘La encrucijada’, 1925, p.122-123)

And he reiterates, nearly twenty years later:

No hay detrás de las caras un yo secreto.

(‘Nueva refutación del tiempo A’, 1944, p.239-240)

Borges, having previously arrived at the conclusion that there is no self and no subject, takes the issue further and asks rhetorically: ‘¿no se aglomeran en uno dos procesos idénticos?’ The numerical sameness of identical moments leads him to apply a version of the doctrine of the Eternal Return. He agrees with Nietzsche on the finiteness of all experiences or possible combinations, but holds that, since there is no subject, the cycles would be one and the same, and that therefore there could not be repetitions or recurrences (see ‘Sentirse en muerte’: Borges lives the self same moment now that was 30 years ago, thus levelling different time planes). The trajectory of his thought is as follows:

Aceptada la tesis de Zarathustra, no acabo de entender cómo dos procesos idénticos dejan de aglomerarse en uno. ¿Basta la mera sucesión, no verificada por nadie?

(‘La doctrina de los ciclos’, 1934)

Si el tiempo es un proceso mental, ¿cómo lo pueden compartir miles de hombres o aun dos hombres distintos?

(‘Historia de la eternidad’, 1936, p. 130)

Podemos postular en la mente de un individuo (o en dos individuos que se ignoran, pero en quienes se opera el mismo mecanismo) dos momentos iguales: Esos idénticos momentos ¿no son el mismo? ¿No basta *un solo término repetido* para desbaratar y confundir la serie del tiempo?

(‘Nueva refutación del tiempo A’, 1944, p.243/244)

And he expands on this idea in the subsequent version of his essay:

Negar el tiempo es dos negaciones: negar la sucesión de los términos de una serie, negar el sincronismo de los términos de dos series.

(‘Nueva refutación del tiempo B’, 1946, p.153)

The experience of timelessness, recounted in ‘Sentirse en muerte’ 1928, 1934, 1944, has for Borges a personal, intuitive certainty which goes beyond the rational. In ‘Nueva refutación del tiempo’, Borges formulates this as what appears to be a confluence of Nietzsche’s notion of the Eternal Return and Leibniz’ Principle.

In 'El tiempo circular', Borges sketches an idea for a story ('Los teólogos'): the theologian and the heretic whom he brings to justice, are really one and the same person in a fictionalization of the principle that the one is identical with the other.

Nuño (1986, Part 9, 114) comments on 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' and Borges' *presentismo*, and also on Borges' particular conception of Archetypes, based on Schopenhauer and on Berkeley's idealism (Nuño 1986, 104). Nuño (1986, 132):

Pero, además de ese presentismo, se deduce con 'rigor adamantino' la absoluta identidad de los instantes, esto es, la indiscernibilidad entre uno y otro.

There are implications for plurality when Borges wonders whether two identical moments in the minds of two or more individuals are one and the same moment and thus refute time. The question is whether qualitatively identical things can be numerically distinct. This does not matter for the monists who believe in only one fundamental entity. However, the problem becomes acute for pluralists, who hold that there are many, numerically distinct things, and must either make them out to be all qualitatively distinct, or else find something else to avoid the full force of Leibnizean Identity of Indiscernibles. In 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', Borges seems to me to adopt a monist stance. If, as Borges argues with Shaw, there is no plurality (of identical yet numerically different moments or experiences), then catastrophes are but a single sorrow, illusorily multiplied in the many mirrors of more than one individual experiencing the same suffering. Borges agrees with Shaw that what one person suffers is the maximum that can be suffered on earth. It accords with his claims that the part is no less numerous than the whole (*Discusión*), that he rejects the whole to exalt each one of the parts ('Nueva refutación del tiempo, B'). And it accords with his Idealistic conviction¹⁴ which denies the world its substance, thus leaving only a system of experience to which the principle of identity can then be applied.

After the epiphanical moment of timelessness in 'Sentirse en muerte', Borges' intellect takes over and he analyses his experience beyond words: the finiteness, *nuestra pobreza*, of such moments of total identity must result in an eternal return,

¹⁴ Substance had been denied to material things by Berkeley; to minds by Hume; to space by both Berkeley and Hume; and to time by Borges.

thus rendering the moment and the perceiver immortal and timeless. But intellect and language cannot grasp the intemporal, though sentiment yearns for it. This cry of resignation echoes as Borges concludes 'Nueva refutación del tiempo': the world, alas, is real; I, alas, am Borges. He is torn between the comfort of the eternal womb for which he longs, and the lonely certainty of individuality forced upon him by his mind. Identity is now irreconcilable in its two meanings of oneness, and of self-identity or otherness. What Borges seeks is permanence (of the experience of transcendence), carrying over the moment into permanence. What he ultimately seeks is God.

Excursions into Christian Mysticism

The appeal to Borges of mysticism in general, and of Silesius in particular lies in their freedom from specific dogmatic tenets and the concentration on inward spiritual experience. What motivates Borges' interest in mysticism, and in philosophers who have transcendence and faith at their heart and whose tensions can only be resolved with a notion of faith or God? How would Pantheism and mysticism dissolve the duality for Borges of time and eternity, and of the accidental and the essential self? And why is mysticism so important to Borges? I would argue that it is so important to Borges precisely because it could provide the answer to the duality of time and identity. Since the relationship between time and eternity corresponds to that between the accidental self and the essential self, mysticism could provide the yearned for release of the accidents of time and self; the release from an otherwise irreconcilable tension and duality between time and eternity on the one hand, and accidental and essential self on the other; time and individuality are thus juxtaposed to eternity and communion.

Eternity, as a Divine attribute, can only be apprehended, and shared by the individual in this world by living in communion with the Divine *in the present moment*, which is the only 'real', here and now; it is the only moment which is truly ours. In living the present moment within the presence, and for the presence of the Divine, in the divine love and for this love as the only purpose of all living, working, and striving, the self (the individual) reaches God within the self. In this union with

God, which can be a constant union if lived in each moment, our present (time) touches and communes with the Divine eternity. A life with the longing for, and the presence of God, and also in the absence of this union, in its forsakenness, in each and every moment, is thus a life shared in the Divine, and in eternity.

Schopenhauer might have termed this 'the eternal present', yet it may be argued that Borges himself, however great his debt to and inspiration from Schopenhauer, is granted no lasting moments of aesthetic transcendence. Apart from Schopenhauer's influence, however, there is evidence of another source of inspiration which suggests transcendence, not aesthetic - as proposed by Schopenhauer or Nietzsche - but mystical. Borges acknowledges the German medieval mystics Daniel Czepko, von Reigenfeld and Angelus Silesius explicitly in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', and implicitly in his stories. The overt acknowledgements are the epigram by von Czepko which heads the 1944 'Prólogo' to 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, A', and another one by Silesius which concludes the 1946 version of the same essay ('Nueva refutación del tiempo, B'), two of the essays most pertinent to the time-identity debate in Borges.

As the epigram to precede the 'Prólogo' to 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, A', Borges chooses Daniel von Czepko, a seventeenth-century German mystic, and one of the leaders of Silurian spiritual reformers, also a poet and writer of religious epigrams who exercised considerable influence on both Scheffler and Silesius. Von Czepko, in the first epigram, speaks of the birth of time in and with God (my own translation of von Czepko's citation in Borges):

Vor mir war keine Zeit, nach mir wird keine seyn,
Mit mir gebiert sie sich, mit mir geht sie auch ein.
(Daniel von Czepko, *Sexcenta monodisticha sapientum*, III, 1655)

There was no time before I was, and after me it will not be,
In me alone it is born, and with me it will cease.

The second version of 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, B' of 1946, with the epigraphs by both Angelus Silesius *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, VI, 263, (1675) and von Czepko, reveal a tension which is more pronounced than ever before in Borges' essayistic writing. It is a tension between immanence (pantheism, Eastern

mysticism) and the concomitant dissolution of personal identity into nothingness on the one hand, and transcendence (mysticism, Christianity) with salvation and the preservation of personal self through union with God on the other. The text also reveals a tension in Borges' conception of the Divine: in his rendering and analyses, and in the absence of faith, God acquires the characteristics of a mere god, and Borges resigns himself to the elusiveness of communion and transcendence.

Silesius, like most German mystics, holds that 'entering into union with God is by way of a breakthrough with the help of godly inspiration'. This is an immediate, unmediated process and unlike the 'three-step-model' of German Theology which holds that union is via purgation and illumination [Schmidt in Shradly 1986]. The unmediated, immediate experience of union with God does not require teaching nor knowledge nor intellectual understanding.

The appeal of Silesius to Borges lies in the relationship which the mystic establishes between time and eternity in their correspondence to the accidental self and the essential self. For Silesius, the unmediated, immediate experience of union with God, one which does not require teaching nor knowledge nor intellectual understanding (Flitch 1932, 66-67):

The first five books [out of the six which comprise the *Cherubinic Wanderer*] may be presumed to have been written [...] before [Scheffler's] public confession of the Catholic faith. [...]. In their concentration upon inward spiritual experience and in their freedom from specific dogmatic tenets these books may be said to represent that *Cor religionum*, the kernel of the Christian faith [...]. The soul needs no induction into the presence of God. 'Away with mediation!' the poet cries [...]. The authority of the Book is no more binding than that of the Church. Scripture is mere writing (*Die Schrift ist Schrift, sonst nichts*). God speaks his word only to the heart. [...] Belief unaccompanied by love is like an empty cask, 'it soundeth but within is naught'.

(Flitch 1932, 67-68):

The supplementary sixth book [the one from which the closing epigram, which features in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, is taken] [...] is overlaid by severe didacticism. [...] The emphasis falls principally on the need for action.

This speaks to Borges on the level of intuition, empathy and longing, yet he himself does not experience it. This lack of experience and the wish for spiritual fulfilment, is, it can be argued, the main driving force behind much of Borges'

intellectual explorations. On this lack of experience Borges himself had commented when he states about his father's library.

In the epilogue to *Historia de la noche* (1977, 558) Borges writes:

De cuantos libros he publicado, el más íntimo es éste. Abunda en referencias librescas; también abundó en ellas Montaigne, inventor de la intimidad. [...] Como ciertas ciudades, como ciertas personas, una parte muy grata de mi destino fueron los libros. ¿me será permitido repetir que la biblioteca de mi padre ha sido el hecho capital de mi vida? La verdad es que nunca he salido de ella [...].

This speaks of a life of intense empathy, sensitivity and power to live and feel through books, but unfulfilled in actuality. The library is thus treated as a metaphor for 'second-hand' experience. Both where mystical experience and living in concerned, Borges - despite his longing for a Divine union, and despite his capacity for empathy and connection with the worlds, lives and thoughts in books - feels (the pain of) a lack of the personal experience of religious, spiritual and personal fulfilment. Borges feels and empathizes, has an intellectual as well as an emotional response to other lives and fates but does not feel that he engages with life in his own sphere. He laments an absence of experience, of connectedness with others in his own life; or perhaps it is rather an indication of others not engaging with him? With his life? Borges' solipsism? This is the opposite of the mystic who indulges in ecstasy but is out of touch with life and humanity. Borges' texts speak of an intuition of and an empathy with a Divine existence which Borges does not ever experience.

In the closing epigram to his own work, *The Cherubic Wanderer*, as well as in the epigram which Borges chose to close 'Nueva refutación del tiempo', Silesius, like Daniel Czepko von Reigersfeld before him, calls for active, *engagé* reading. This speaks of the transformation of the soul-searching self as becoming the very word and essence of that which the self aspires to penetrate into (i.e. union of the self with God):

Freund es ist auch genug. Im Fall du mehr willst lesen
So geh und werde selbst die Schrift und selbst das Wesen.

Friend, it is now enough. Wouldst thou read more, go hence,
Become thyself the Writing and thyself the Sense.¹⁵

¹⁵ Translation by Flitch 1932 (211).

Another translation (which bears echoes of the Cabbalistic notion of the world as the secret writing of God might further illustrate its attraction to Borges):

Friend, let this be enough; if you wish more to read
Go and become yourself the writ and that which is.¹⁶

This reading process exceeds mere reflection. It is a conversion: once the inner conversion process is complete, reading becomes obsolete, to be replaced by life¹⁷. In this the urge to leave reading aside and now turn to life itself Silesius echoes von Czepko. He urges the reader to this very action to give oneself over to the mystical experience. It is an exhortation which Borges recognizes, intellectually and emotively, but which he also capitulates to in his own lack of fulfillment.

This epigram concludes *The Cherubinic Wanderer*, Silesius' book of mystical revelations. The final lines urge the reader, the searcher for truth, to emulate the writer's own experience, to *be* that which he searches for. The search is for the union of the self with God, and for the transcendence of time. *The Cherubinic Wanderer* is also about the manifold manifestations of the search and the eventual union with God. Transcending selfhood and time are afforded by the mystical experience of serenity, whereby the worldly and corrupted ways of seeing things, and the slavery to selfhood, are transformed in order to arrive at a union of the self with the other which is no longer 'other' (Flitch 1932, 80-81):

The self, having shed off everything which constituted it as a self, is seen to be one with the Divine Essence. The other, for which the self craved so long as it was a self, is no longer other. Rid of selfhood, the self finds that in its inmost essence it is abiding in the Godhead whence it has never 'gone out'. [...] I and Thou are indistinguishable terms. The Thou discovers itself to be one with the That.

Flitch (1932, 79) elaborates:

The outer man is the empirical or personal I, the mortal body with its psychic filling, the earthly, creaturely I which constitutes a distinguishable person and makes a man a Henry or a Conrad. This all-too-human I, which appears and passes away, accidental and fundamentally unreal, can never aspire to become one with the Divine reality. It is but the outward shell which encloses the inner or essential I.

'That' is the Divine, is the personal God, the Godhead is impersonal, ultimate Reality. 'This' (God, *That*) is what the reader of Silesius (*Thou*) is encouraged to

¹⁶ Translation by Shradly 1986.

¹⁷ See Gnädinger's 'Nachwort' in Gnädinger 1984 (366-367).

become, to be. For the mystic, *Thou* is the outer, empirical, accidental I. This 'shell of selfhood' is directly linked to time. The individuated 'I', the mortal body¹⁸, the individuated I (1932, 76-79) contrasts with the inner, essential self, the unified 'I', which is linked to eternity. The relation between the accidental and the essential self corresponds to the relation between time and eternity (Flitch 1932, 84):

Time [is] the abode of the fragmentary and unreal. It is the illusion of the accidental self.

Silesius equates Eternity with God, time with the devil. Hell can be seen as perpetual, without any possibility of transcendence (see 'La duración del infierno'). The whole of Book VIII of the 1932 edition of the *Cherubinic Wanderer* is dedicated to time and eternity, which echoes of other German medieval mystics like Böhme, Frankenberg, and also von Czepko (Flitch 1932, 30):

He to whom Time is as Eternity and Eternity as Time is freed from all conflict.

Silesius on time and eternity (cited in Shrady 1986, 30):

In Hell there is no Eternity: 'Reflect on this with care: God is Eternity; with the devil in hell, eternal time will be'.

(Book 5:74)

Time thus contrasts with the inner, existential I, the essential and unified self in the Divine, and the eternal (all quotes in Flitch 1932, 84-85):

Eternity is the sphere or habitat of Reality. [...] Eternity [...] has got nothing to do with perpetuity of existence or infinite longevity. It is another dimension of being. It is rather an experience or a state, the state of perfection [...].

The aim of the mystic is to pass from Time into Eternity, a process which is identical with the spiritual birth or Divine union.

Time and eternity are in a sense interpenetrating; both are present simultaneously as two different perspectives are present to the eye from the same point of view. The one [eternity] presents a view of reality, the other [time] its unreal reflection in the mirror of time. The aim of the mystic is to pass from the temporal to the Eternal Now.

The union of the self with God, with the Absolute means that the knower must become the known (see Flitch 1932, 101), as fictionalised by Borges in 'El

¹⁸ The outer man is the empirical or personal I, the mortal body with its psychic filling, the earthly, creaturely I which constitutes a distinguishable person and makes a man a Henry or a Conrad. This all-too-human I, which appears and passes away, accidental and fundamentally unreal, can never aspire to become one with the Divine reality. It is but the outward shell which encloses the inner or essential I.

acercamiento a Almotásim'. See Flitch (1932, 76) and Shrady (1986, 23) on this very mystical union:

Union [of the true self of the individual] or identity with the larger self of the All, whether it be termed God, the Absolute, or Ultimate Reality.

[Mystics] enter into union [with God] by way of a breakthrough with the help of [...] Divine inspiration.

Ending his spiritual journey in the *Cherubinic Wanderer*, Silesius urges the reader-searcher to move from *reading about* the mystical union with God to *being* (at) one with 'the larger self of the All, whether it be termed God, the Absolute, or Ultimate Reality' (Flitch 1932, 76). In this process of becoming, writing is transformed into the experience itself (the union and the identity of the self with God). In a template of roles and assignments, (Silesius) the writer hands over the task to the reader-searcher. The reader-searcher is Borges and each reader of Borges' text, and the task is to become the writer, i.e. the one who experiences the union, the one who is God in himself.

It is legitimate to take the work of Silesius out of its monotheistic, Catholic context, for outwith that context it does have pantheistic, even spiritualistic echoes, and Borges acknowledges this in 'La flor de Coleridge'. It is a possible and indeed satisfying reading, for Silesius' intellectual poetry is - in its brevity and condensity, coupled with the work's paradox and musical quality, its audacity and didactics - appealing to seekers of all faiths or none (Shrady 1986, xviii, xix). It offers 'poetic versions of key concepts of existential philosophy' (Shrady 1986, xxii, 3) which appeals to modern readers and seekers of all faiths, or none.

Yet, legitimate or otherwise, and satisfying as it may be in intellectual or aesthetic terms, to miss out the monotheistic, religious framework also means an incomplete reading of Silesius' work. In doing so, Borges ignores one component, all-important to mystical experience, the ultimate source and aim of the mystic's search: God as the supreme, transcendental reality, not G/god as merely identical with the material reality. Silesius warns against a self that is not rooted in God. This is a distinction which is mirrored in that drawn between the notion of 'the real' (transcendental) and ordinary reality (Flitch 1932, 88):

Nature is but a medium which imperfectly transmits the light of the Divine reality. Things are real only in as far as they exist in God, and so far as they are not in God their existence is illusory. It is when they claim reality for themselves that they are most unreal. The assertion of a self, the exercise of selfwill, is an act by which the creature alienates itself from God and cuts loose from the root of Being.

The main theme of mysticism is 'the transformation of the outer, worldly and corrupted way of seeing things' which is serenity (Shrady 1986, 22). But the transcendence of selfhood for the mystic (Flitch 1932, 76-84) is different from the Buddhist notion of nothingness, a concept which also exercises great influence over Borges (Flitch 1932, 80-81):

For Angelus, self-abandonment meant [...] the abandonment, the radical annihilation, of the self itself. The self must make an unconditional surrender of its selfhood. It must lose all sense of self-identity, of particularity, of otherness. Above all, it must be quit of all desires, [...] even for God himself; for the persistence of any desire attests the fact that the desiring self still lives on. It must die. It must cease to be. The categorical of Angelus Silesius is *Sei nicht* - Be not. If this were the conclusion of the whole matter [...] the doctrine embodied in the *Cherubinic Wanderer* might appear to be scarcely distinguishable from that of Buddhist nihilism, culminating in the total extinction of self in Nirvana. But [in Silesius' mysticism] the self, having shed off everything which constituted it as a self, is seen to be one with the Divine Essence! The other, for which the self craved so long as it was a self, is no longer other. Rid of its selfhood the self finds that in its inmost essence it is abiding in the Godhead whence it has never 'gone out'. [...] Gladly does the self surrender its individuality in order to find itself in the boundless Whole. [...] I and Thou are indistinguishable terms. The Thou discovers itself to be one with the That.

The search for transformation leads to a search for a state of serenity. Searching is what underlies all of Borges' essayistic writing; the search is also a central theme in his stories. One of the German medieval mystics' most central notions regards the search; like the Sufi mystics, the search must be subordinated to the abandonment to God, a total and active submission to God as one's only good, even beyond the desire to be in God (Shrady 1986, 26) and (Flitch 1932, 83 and 78) respectively:

The more one seeks you [God], the less one finds you. You should so seek Him that you find him nowhere.

Abandonment of self [...] with its longing even for God.

The negative Way of Mysticism leads to an understanding of nothingness:

Being indefinable, or definable only in negative terms, the Godhead must appear from our human standpoint as the very essence of Negation, and the mystics did not scruple to designate it by the term Nihil. [...] in the *Cherubinic Wanderer*: 'God is a sheer Naught - the more thou graspest after Him the more He escapes thee'.

Silesius uses contradiction, and paradox, in order to transcend ordinary consciousness (all in Shradly 1986, x, 14, and 28):

He [Silesius] employs concepts that seem contradictory. Employed as means of thinking the unthinkable, grasping that which cannot be grasped, they often negate themselves. This is inevitable and appropriate when thought invites failure by trying to express what is beyond thought.

Paradoxical, not truly contradictory, to instruct and familiarize the reader with basic concepts of faith in a highly condensed form.

One must go beyond thought.

Despite Silesius' undisputed place amongst both mystics and poets, his commentators are divided as to the actual experience which informed his writing. That Borges is drawn to a mystic poet who himself might have been torn between experience and knowledge is perhaps not insignificant (Shradly 1986, xix):

[The *Cherubinic Wanderer* displays] the inner life of a person who has come to knowledge of the Divine through experience and not through learning.

This contrasts with Flitch's assertion as to Silesius' own lack of fulfillment (1932, 61):

He [Silesius] has not yet succeeded in finding the central point of that Eternity into which he so ardently yearns to pass. [...] He is himself the wheel that runs of himself and known never any peace. He is in conflict with himself. [...]. [His assertions] owe their triumphant resonance to a logic of mysticism that was proved to the intellect rather than upon the heart.

His reiterated Alas! Alas! voices a sense of unfulfillment. (1932, p.61)

In 'La flor de Coleridge' of 1945 Borges uses Shelley's pantheistic notion (of all poems being fragments of one single infinite poem) in order to advance his own idea of 'la historia de la evolución de una idea a través de los textos heterogéneos de tres autores' (Coleridge, Wells, Henry James). Borges intimates an error in his own understanding of literature in adhering to the erroneous belief that all literature was embodied in one writer in successive times (p.20) and concludes on Silesius, whose work abounds in references to God, by referring to him as a pantheist:

Al promediar del siglo XVII, el epigramatista del panteísmo Angelus Silesius dijo que todos los bienaventurados son uno (*Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, V, 7) y que todo cristiano debe ser Cristo (*op.cit.* V, 9).

(p.20, note 2)

The reference to Silesius' pantheism is surprising. It seems to attest to a tendency in Borges to avert the impact of a Divine onto another level. The very canticles alluded to by Borges, V7, and V9, speak of the unity of all saints (cited in Gnädinger 1984). The unity is Trinitarian, not Pantheist:

Alle Heiligen sind ein Heiliger

Die Heiligen alle sind ein Heiliger allein:

Weil sie ein Hertz / Geist / Sinn / in einem Leibe seyn.

All saints are one saint

All saints are One saint alone:

Because they are one heart / spirit / mind in one body.

The second verse is Silesius V.9 (cited in Gnädinger 1984):

Es muß ein jeder Christus seyn

Der wahre Gottes Sohn ist Christus nur allein:

Doch muß ein jeder Christ derselbe Christus seyn.

Every one must be Christ

The true Son of God is only Christ alone:

Yet every Christian must be the same Christ.

Everybody is therefore a son of God. This is so because there is only one Jesus Christ, in which each one shares. In this communion with the Divine through the Son, and in the ultimate oneness of all, identity (and individuality) of the self are preserved (unlike in Borges' Simurgh). This, according to Christian mysticism, is the way in which the individual reaches union with the Divine, through the Son. In Borges' essays, and his poems, it is this very emphasis on the Son, and Borges' ambiguous stance, which, it could be argued, accounts for the attraction of pantheism to Borges: He is attracted to the mystical notion of the Christ figure, yet repelled at the notion of the Trinity, possibly due to an aversion of the Father figure.

In his lecture on beauty ('La poesía' in *Siete Noches*, 120-121), Borges calls again on Silesius' mystical rose to sum up his own view on beauty:

Tengo para mí que la belleza es una sensación física, algo que sentimos con todo el cuerpo. No es el resultado de un juicio, no llegamos a ella por medio de reglas; sentimos la belleza o no la sentimos. Voy a concluir con un alto verso del poeta que en el siglo diecisiete tomó el nombre extrañamente poético, real, de Angelus Silesius. Viene a ser el resumen de todo cuanto he dicho esta noche, salvo que lo he dicho por medio de razonamientos o de simulados razonamientos; lo diré primero en español y después en alemán, para que lo oigan ustedes:

La rosa sin por qué florece porque florece.

Die Rose ist ohne warum; sie blühet weil sie blühet.

The rose can be interpreted as Christ's mystical body. The rose in Silesius symbolizes the crucified Christ (Christ crucified on the rose tree); it also signifies the flower of (Christ's?) love¹⁹; and the mystical rose is also one of the symbols of Mary. The rose in Borges signifies love. Together, these symbols combine into the rose as Christ's sacrificial love. In Borges, there is a recurring motif of the Christ, and of the poet (himself?) as a Christ figure, a sacrificial figure.

1946/53: Buddhism & Platonic Forms embraced

In 'La nadería de la personalidad' Borges explicitly challenges Berkeley on the issue of an underlying reality or Divinity (p.122) and holds that reality is a simulacrum, a mirage: He categorically states that there is nothing underlying our empirical reality, nothing that we might call absolute reality (or Reality). This a view which Borges is much later, in the 1953 prologue to 'Historia de la eternidad', to modify and drastically change. Thus, later in his essayistic life, we detect a solace for Borges in Platonic Forms over Berkeley's Idealist universe held together by a God. Nuño links the problematics which the Idealist doctrine holds, and links it with the Platonic notion of the Idea. Nuño points out that idealism (*mentalismo*) holds a kind of 'attraction' in blurring the distinction between hallucination and perception, between vision and dream. He detects a particular attraction which the fusion of the Platonic notion of archetypes with Berkeley's *mentalismo idealista* holds for Borges (Nuño 1986, 104):

Que el mundo sensible [Schopenhauer's empirical world] sea una mera representación de la voluntad ayuda a preservar la realidad y preeminencia del mundo inteligible, pues aquel [el mundo empírico], degradado y material, aunque sea su copia, se reduce en definitiva a la proyección de la mente humana, y sirve para explicar la producción del pluralismo material. De ese modo, la creencia en un mundo inteligible de Formas y Arquetipos le compensa a Borges la vaciedad ontológica del idealismo mentalista berkeleyano. Reducir el mundo (materia, yo, relaciones) a la mera percepción particular es tanto como condenarlo a la fugacidad perceptiva, al presentismo subjetivo, tan bien descrito en el mundo fantasmagórico de Tlön. La fuerza del mentalismo es tal que no está asegurada la separación entre alucinación y percepción, entre visión y sueño.

¹⁹ See Gnädinger's 'Nachwort' in Gnädinger 1984.

In his 1953 'Prólogo' to the new edition of *Historia de la eternidad*, Borges comes to acknowledge Platonic Forms. This statement can be seen as a tentative conclusion to his ongoing postulation and refutation of concern with notions of time, selfhood, and with his quest for an apprehension of a Divine union.

In the 1946 edition of 'Nueva refutación del tiempo B', Borges had brought together those philosophers who had shaped his understanding of notions of time and of selfhood, from whom he, however, also departed the most radically. He had grappled with an intimation of transcendence, only to resign himself to his forever being a prisoner to his own consciousness, to time, and most poignantly so, to being himself:

And yet, and yet ...Negar la sucesión temporal, negar el yo, negar el universo astronómico, son desesperaciones aparentes y consuelos secretos. [...] El tiempo es la substancia de que estoy hecho. [...] El mundo, desgraciadamente, es real; yo, desgraciadamente, soy Borges.

It is after this desperate resignation that Borges introduces the Buddhist tale of King Milinda (Menandro) in the 'Nota al prólogo' to the same essay. Again, Borges makes an almost desperate, intellectual attempt at offering himself alternatives to the nothingness, and at the same time the inescapability of his own being. This text is central to the Buddhist teaching. On the question of identity and of what constitutes self, King Milinda and the enlightened Nagasena engage in a dialogue, in which Nagasena asks Milinda to identify him with any of his attributes, bodily or mental. Nagasena denies that he himself, indeed that any self, is inherent in any of the attributes that pertain to his body or mind. He is neither his emotions nor his perceptions or his consciousness. This refers to the Buddhist notion of *dhakkas*. King Milinda concludes that there is no Nagasena apart from or beyond any of the above.

The nothingness of self is a Borgesian theme, yet for Borges it is not liberating but painful. For a succinct exposition of the Buddhist notion of no-self see Markham and Ruparell (2001, 197-199):

While it is true to say, then, that there is some degree of continuity from one existence to the next, any notion of a substantial entity being passed over or being transferred from one life to another is rejected in Buddhism. The Buddha opposed the Upanisadic theory of the soul, *atman*, as an unchanging essence, and argued that the person was more like a combination of rapidly changing phenomena, constantly

shifting and moving. [...] Therefore it is wiser for any teaching on the subject to concentrate on *how* a person functions [...] rather than on what a person actually is. [The Buddha] was not interested in a theory about what self is; in fact, attachments to such opinions and views is often detrimental to the attainment of wisdom and insight.

Buddhism affirms the non-permanence and changeability of self. *Anatta* is the no-self; it refers to the fact that 'there is no permanent or immutable essence to anything, no underlying unchanging self [this is unlike the Upanishadic tradition which holds that there is indeed such a self, *atman*], not even within the human person' [Markham and Ruparell 2001, 197]. On the nature of existence and how it operates, Buddhist Scriptures assert:

The world of *samsara* is entirely made up of conditioned phenomena. Nothing exists independently except *Nirvana*. Consequently, any clinging or grasping onto those things which are impermanent (because of their dependency) is foolish and will cause further suffering. The roots of spiritual ignorance lie here. The process of awakening can only occur once one starts to live in accordance with the truth that all conditioned things are insubstantial and fleeting. To help his followers understand this more clearly, the Buddha set out three definitive features of existence: *dukkha*, suffering; *anicca*, impermanence; and *anatta*, no-self.

Anicca refers specifically to the fact that all conditioned things are impermanent and will pass away: everything that comes into being arises and then falls. This includes states of mind as well as physical phenomena, like mountains and trees. [...] Buddhist spirituality is about letting go rather than holding onto those things which are characterized by impermanence.

Anatta is related to this concept and refers to the fact that there is no permanent or immutable essence to anything, no underlying unchanging self, not even within the human person. [Hence it is pointless to concern oneself with questions as to the *what* of a person; rather, one should look at the *how*.] What constitutes an individual is the combination of five *khandas* or groups of grasping: body, feeling, senses, constructing activities, and consciousness. During each lifetime these constituents interact dynamically with each other, making up what might be termed [...] 'the person'. [Meditation exposes the *khandas* as] a bundle of mental and physical processes, without any real substance. At each rebirth these are reconstituted in accordance with the working out of the law of *karma* and in relation to the mind-set, *citta*, which has developed in each person. There might be distinctive personality traits which are passed over from one lifetime to the next, but these fluctuate and are never unchanging over successive rebirths. [References such as 'self' or 'myself', even when used by the Buddha] are 'mere names' and only refer to the empirical or conventional 'self', as some might refer to the 'soul' in Christianity as signifying the eternal or real 'spiritual essence' or 'core' of the person. The famous conversation between King Milinda and Nagasena about the analogy of the chariot illustrates this teaching succinctly:

'If you have come on a chariot, then, please explain to me what a chariot is. Is the pole the chariot? [In response to this King Milinda denies that the pole, nor any of the other constituents of the chariot are the chariot. However, he asserts that:] It is in dependence on the pole, the axle, the wheels, framework, the flagstaff etc that there takes place this denomination 'chariot', this conceptual term, a current appellation and a mere name'.

King Milinda thus affirms that there is no unchanging, underlying essence to self, and affirms what Nagasena had previously asserted about his own identity: 'I am known as Nagasena [...] yet it is but a denotation, designation, a current usage, for Nagasena is only a name since no person is got at here.' (Beckerlegge 2001, 349).

There is in Borges a tension between the following: knowledge and experience; faith and God; immanence and transcendence; the quest and union; origin and release from pain and a sense of a wounded self.

In Borges' writing, there thus are a few, but highly relevant texts which speak of the transcendence of the self with a higher 'other'. These are 'El coloquio de los pájaros' in 'El acercamiento a Almotásim'; the two epigraphs by von Czepko and Silesius in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' (versions A and B respectively); and the Buddhist tale of Melandro's carriage, a symbolic carriage which, like man, is neither its individual parts nor can it exist outside its parts which Borges introduces in the 'Nota al Prólogo' in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo'). Although all of these texts appear in conjunction with other texts (essays or stories), none is an integral text in itself in that they either head or end stories and essays or appear as footnotes or appendices. And only two of these texts speak of, or imply, the accomplished union of the self with the Divine, of the mystical transcendence of the self into the other, of the passing from time into eternity. These are the epigrams by von Czepko and Silesius. The fact that none of these transcendental texts are integral stories in themselves is significant. It places the experience, the attainment, outside the realm of the experience accessible to neither Borges himself, nor to any of his characters. They are not fictional, but auto-biographical experiences of mystical or, at any rate spiritual wisdom; narratorial voice corresponds to authorial voice; it is the recounting of actual experience.

The only integral text which Borges seems to have felt as coming closest to an actual transcendence of the yoke of time and the painful process of individuation is 'Sentirse en muerte'. Yet even this experience remains fleeting and cannot be seen as truly transforming. Lastly, and most significantly so, Borges concludes his writing

with the epigram by Silesius which asks the reader to leave reading, and writing behind, and to literally become that which, or the one who, one is searching for: God.

PART TWO: THE STORIES

On close analysis, the essays as well as fictional work belie Borges' statement in the 'Epílogo' (1952) of *Otras Inquisiciones*:

Dos tendencias he descubierto, al corregir las pruebas, en los misceláneos trabajos de este volumen. Una, a estimar las ideas religiosas o filosóficas por su valor estético y aun por lo que encierran de singular y de maravilloso.. Esto es, quizá, indicio de un escepticismo esencial. Otra, a presuponer (y a verificar) que el número de fábulas o de metáforas de que es capaz la imaginación de los hombres es limitado, pero que esas contadas invenciones pueden ser todo para todos, como el Apóstol.

('Epílogo', 1952, *Otras Inquisiciones*, p.293)

The concepts of time, identity, and of a Divine order underlying our everyday existence had both fascinated and vexed Borges for most of his life; they elude exact definition and also finality due to the variegations which Borges imposes onto them. In the turmoil of such oscillating argumentations, however, there is one constant. It is his pained tension, rooted within his very intellect: his rational, intellectual mind concludes that time and identity are null and void; yet the limitations of the mind, and most significantly so, an absence of faith, bar him from actually experiencing the absence of time, or the release from individuation. Barrenechea concludes her work of 1957 by directing the reader's attention to this very disjunction between Borges' intellectual desire to explore and understand the nature of existence and of reality on the one hand, and his intuitive conviction as to the futility of any such attempt. It can be argued that, although Borges concludes intellectually that time is illusory, and self-will may be abandoned in the knowledge of a greater union in a timeless sphere, he nonetheless remains a prisoner to a consciousness which postulates the very tenets to its own existence, and which, in the absence of faith, he can therefore not logically question nor overcome or transcend.

Writing as experience

How could that release from individuation be achieved? It would be achieved through partaking in the eternal, the Divine, by the realization of the soul. Yet this requires faith in a higher, spiritual reality, in an Absolute. Yet Borges does not, perhaps cannot make this leap of faith, and as a consequence a gap, painfully

experienced by Borges himself, develops between knowledge and experience. This gap between knowledge and experience is time and time again made explicit by Borges himself when he seems to be attributing an inferior value to writing, as opposed to living, as if the two were separable. Adolfo Murguía (1983) discusses Borges' deprecation of the act of (his own) writing as a form of inferior compensation for 'real' living, i.e. for experience. His point of departure is Borges' statement in the prologue of *Discusión* (quoted in Murguía 1983, 77):

Vida y muerte le han faltado a mi vida.
De esa indignancia, mi laborioso amor por estas minucias.
Ne sé si la disculpa del epígrafe valdrá.

For Murguía, this is not an expression of modesty, nor of rhetoric, but a genuinely felt inadequacy on Borges' part with regards to the value and worthiness of his art (1983, 82-84):

En el citado prólogo borgiano aparece una misma palabra, 'vida', dos veces en la misma oración. Lo dicho en ambas es distinto. La primera vez hace referencia al juego de riesgo, movimiento y peligro. La segunda, 'mi vida', hace referencia a su biografía.

[...]

Ambas vidas aparecen como opuestas, y la una, en cierto modo, como compensación de la otra. La primera sería la decisiva, juez de la segunda. 'La vida', entendida como violencia, en cuanto agresión, aparece como la medida de la escritura.

[...]

Aparece aquí, a mi entender, la interiorización por Borges de una medida inadecuada: la literatura, el ejercicio de la escritura son presentados al lector como 'minucias'. Me inclino a creer que no se trata aquí de retórica benevolenta, o de honesta modestia, sino de una perspectiva, injusta quizá, sobre el propio quehacer.

[...]

Hay quizá en este punto, un doble error. Tanto respecto de los otros y de su acción, como respecto de la propia actividad. Aparece una atribución al profano de una lucidez o de un conocimiento muchas veces inexistente, que tiene su contrapartida en la disminución, hasta casi lo ínfimo, de lo que a la inteligencia se refiere.

[...]

Presentar 'la vida' entendida como algo ajeno, exterior, que está en otro sitio, lleva, naturalmente, al dolor de la nostalgia. Esta comienza a estrechar el mundo del pensador. Poco a poco comienza éste a creer que lo esencial está en otra parte, comienza a mirar papeles y libros como a sus enemigos, hasta que, por fin, los abandona. [...].

He distinguishes between *el escritor*, the writer who merely writes, and *el creador*, who is at once writer, thinker, and creator, compelled to be carrying out his work, despite the arduousness and loneliness of such an enterprise, and with a sense of the sacred nature of this intellectual art. He holds that the sense of guilt is alluded to in Borges by his reference to *la disculpa*. This sense of guilt, argues Murguía,

originates in the writer's painful, all too critical awareness as to the 'pastness', and hence inferiority of his creations (1983, 84-86):

La cuestión aludida se refiere a la imagen clásica del escritor [...]. Se hace referencia con ello a una suerte de necesidad interior, de gravedad, de espacio sagrado, por el que lucha y del que surge la escritura. [...] El tipo de escritura a que fundamentalmente se hace aquí alusión son el poetizar y la obra de pensamiento. De ahí son comprensibles, derivadamente, el trabajo literario o científico en sentido actual.

[...]

La escritura a la que aquí hacemos referencia, interiormente orientada, es, al mismo tiempo, invulnerable y frágil. ¿Qué le da su fuerza? Precisamente su unidad interior, su carácter necesario. Este la hace inmune a la indiferencia, ya que nadie ha de criticarla de modo más certero e implacable que el propio autor, de cuyo ejercicio crítico saldrá otra obra nueva.

[...]

La 'culpa' del escritor radica en moverse, continua y expresamente, en ese ámbito de lo significativo, de lo significativo, en la invisibilidad del sentido o de su ausencia. ¿Por qué se constituye ello en culpa? Porque el recuerdo indica diferencia, y nada hay que aborrezcamos tanto como el recuerdo de nuestra pequeñez. Esta alcanza su colmo al hacernos creer que no hay medida.

[...]

Lo grave acontece al 'interiorizar' el meditador el criterio falso de la pequeñez.

And with regards to Borges' labour of love for the 'minutiae' of writing, he holds that work and life, and the very processes of writing and living, are inextricably linked, and really one:

La obra sólo se lleva adelante en cuando se la ama, esto quiere decir, cuando ella tiene preeminencia sobre nosotros, cuando, al constituirla, al formarla, somos por primera vez. [...] Sólo a partir de ese encuentro positivo con lo grande y limitado de la obra adquiere sentido ese 'laborioso amor' a que Borges alude. Sólo desde él nos movemos en un horizonte de sentido, difuso y lejano, pero como referencia finalmente abierta. Sólo de ese modo podemos sobrellevar los días y noches en la mesa de trabajo, las bibliotecas amorosamente fatigadas, las horas sin respuesta. [...] Se trata, en primer lugar, de hallarse al servicio de algo mayor que uno mismo.

[...]

La escritura en sentido propio, no es una parte al margen de la propia vida: obra y vida coinciden. Esta con aquella y recíprocamente.

Murguía also asserts the self-sufficiency, the contingent and yet the absolute value of the text:

El texto, en cambio, cuando está logrado, se basta. [...] Al igual que todo hombre, la obra es a la vez necesaria y gratuita. No tenía por qué ser, pero desde que está, su estar no puede consistir en otra cosa más que en una ocupación con ese ser que le ha sido impuesto.

El tema que dio origen a estas consideraciones es el aludido por Borges, 'la vida ausente'. Señalamos dicho tema porque él, de una manera u otra, aparece reiteradamente en la obra borgiana. Otras de sus formas es el tema de la violencia y del coraje [...]. El coraje, el 'haber sido valiente' es una de las virtudes que Borges más aprecia, y que se contrapone, según él, de algún modo, al orden y al silencio de las bibliotecas.

La pregunta entonces, tácitamente aludida por Borges, planteada de un modo más explícito y general, resultaría la siguiente: ¿Es que acaso la vida pensante tiene su origen en el temor? ¿Es que son acaso los libros una defensa contra el miedo? [...] Este tema borgiano de la ausencia de la vida en las bibliotecas se ha convertido en un tópico, en un lugar común para referirse al alcance de la vida intelectual. [...].

For Murguía, the theme of a life not lived is a theme which runs through all of Borges' work, and he alludes to a link between this theme of absence, and of another Borgesian theme: that of courage. Murguía's connection between the themes of life not lived, and the theme of courage can be extended further: for Borges, it can be argued, courage is a redeeming virtue, a virtue by which he attempts to redeem his characters, and by extension himself, forever, however, insufficiently so.

Having taken as his point of departure Borges' *menosprecio* of his writing, Murguía (1983, 77) takes it forward and confers upon it a value. He concludes in defense of the Borgesian, and indeed in defense of any intellectual creation, including, one may conclude, his own:

Lejos de ser la obra efecto del temor, ella es, por el contrario, resultado del silencio ante la catarata vacía de fonemas, como atrevimiento de la palabra ante el anhelante silencio.

Murguía's analysis makes a necessary makes a case for Borges' writing as creation. It is valuable in that it raises the status and the value, and the artistic nature of intellectual writing. He thus gives to Borges what Borges himself seems to have denied himself, at least overtly so: status, recognition, and worth. But in the light of the analysis of his essays and the mystical experience aspired to, yet never fully lived, Borges' words in *Discusión* should be taken further, and at more than face value. In fact, it is debatable whether Borges had indeed as lowly an opinion of his art as is generally ascribed to him. In other words: Borges' words in *Discusión* should perhaps be taken with some degree of scepticism as to their face value.

To this effect, Jim Aitken (2001, 80) quotes an excerpt from an interview by Borges to Rita Guibert in 1968 (Guibert 1972, 92, cited in Aitken 2001, 80). Borges was asked whether an intellectual, if he shuts himself away in an ivory tower and possibly even ignores reality, can make a contribution to solving the problems of society. To which Borges replies:

Possibly shutting oneself up in an ivory tower and thinking about other things may be one way of modifying reality. I live in an ivory tower - as you call it - creating a poem, or a book, and that can be just as real as anything. People are generally wrong when they take reality as meaning daily life, and think of the rest as unreal. In the long run, emotions, ideas, and speculations are just as real as everyday events. I believe that all the dreamers and philosophers in the world are having an influence on our present-day life.

In Aitken's view (2001, 80), Borges possesses 'a vision of an expansive sense of reality which challenged our human condition and extended the realm of our being here in time.' From Borges' reply to Guibert he concludes that 'what he [Borges] creatively construes to be true is made true in his work' (2001, 80). Borges' *ficciones* are not about character, nor are they about motif, cause or effect; they are about an event, a miracle; there is, however, a marked shift in Borges' prose writing with his later stories, notably those of *El informe de Brodie*. Those stories are about exactly that which had been absent in the earlier fictions: character, causality, motivation. With regards to the earlier fictions, this view is confirmed by Aitken who asserts the oneness of Borges with the world he inhabits, both spatially, and intellectually (2001, 81):

Borges is not concerned with traditional narratives with credible characters and events; his realm of writing is itself a quest, a journey of literary exploration seeking out the meaning of being, searching after truth, after ultimate reality. It is for this reason that his work is constantly peppered with quotations and references from ancient Chinese religions and philosophical systems, from Jewish and Islamic mystics, from western philosophy and from virtually all known literary traditions. For Borges what is of the world is also of him since he is of the world himself.. and fuelled by an ancestral dynamic which allows his mind such intellectual freedom.

With respect to the stories of *El Aleph*, Aitken states (2001, 83):

What Borges is doing in this kind of writing is stating the fact that the search relentlessly continues [...].

In the following extract, he quotes Borges as affirming the depth of passion which compels him in and to his writing. Borges himself, unlike in various other quotes where he seems to belittle his own intellectual work, ascribes a definite worth to literature, including his own (Borges 1974, 164-165, cited in Aitken 2001, 84):

Literature is not a mere juggling of words; what matters is what is left unsaid, or what may be read between the lines; were it not for this deep inner feeling, literature would be no more than a game, and we all know that it can be much more than that.

Aitken holds that Borges, in this enterprise of literature, displays sincerity, courage, strength, but also existential pain (2001, 84):

This suggests a brave and deeply serious undertaking by a writer, and implicit in this bravery is a kind of existential anguish about our condition; an uneasiness with our being here and the conditions governing it. How we are and how it is for us is challenged by Borges through his literary and metaphysical reflections. By confronting our existential condition we extend ourselves, we reach out beyond ourselves, beyond time.

What is worth emphasising, though, and what Murguía omits in his analysis, is that Borges, in the quote from *Discusión*, albeit less overtly so, hints not only at the apparent lack of life, but of life and also death: *Vida y muerte le han faltado a mi vida*. How might this assertion be interpreted? And, in the light of the above assertions and discussions, an analysis might benefit from not only going beyond the biographical, but also by going beyond the intellectual. I would argue that on the one hand, life and death can serve as a metaphor for experiential activity, as an expression of passion and of intensity. But life and death are also a metaphor for passion in a deeper, mystical sense. For the mystic, the notion of death is not merely physical, and it is more still than the gateway to eternal life; death is also the death experienced, indeed longed for in this life: the death of the self, of anything that is ego and is self will and which thus stands in the way of the emergence of the true self. The true self is the one which had died to what St Paul calls 'the old man' inside. More so, the true self is more itself precisely because it has died to itself because it has emptied itself and thus made room for a self which is now united with that from which it originates and with which it is really one. This new self is at once both empty of itself, and more fully and truly itself than ever before.

Thus *vida y muerte*, it could be argued, refer to the transcendence of the self, ego, individuation, of time, and of anything that ties the self down, anything which prevents it from fully experiencing that union and that unity with its essence which Borges, and the characters of his fictions, long to transcend into. From that death to the self then stems true *vida*, a life united in the spiritual reality. This is Borges' longing, and also his regret.

Oscillation

Borges' texts themselves oscillate between denying and affirming the self. There is a discreet level in his philosophical and spiritual explorations which is concerned with a quest for wholeness, for completeness, for union with a reality

which transcends ordinary reality, for union with a Being transcending and enduring the individual self. Borges' quest is for the spiritual reality of the self, i.e. the soul, a reality or dimension which he, in the 1920s vehemently denies. Yet, his very denial bears echoes of an intimation of such a reality, which Borges approximates more and more but which he never fully apprehends. The earliest of the essays underlying this analysis, 'El cielo azul, es cielo y es azul' of the year 1922, in its slightly unstructured, inexplicit rejection of what Borges later, in 'La encrucijada de Berkeley' of 1925 explains is Berkeley's God, can be seen as an unarticulated, embryonic attempt at the sublimation of a more personal anguish, an attempt at a transference onto an intellectual level not yet fully accomplished; this initial rejection is to find its full articulation three years later in 'La encrucijada de Berkeley'. Borges' youthful protestations in 1923 of the nothingness of the personal self in 'La nadería de la personalidad' can be seen as a manifestation of his denial of fundamental concepts: enduring love, an essence to the self, time, God, and of the meaning of existence. These clamorous protestations of the nothingness of all that might constitute a soul, a self, reveal themselves as expressions of a deeply wounded sense of self, of love, and the meaning of existence.

They are also evidence of an enduring preoccupation which Borges displayed throughout his writing career: that of the shifting personal identity, or duality of being. Donald A. Yates traces the continuity of the dual self-image from the mid 1920s to the 1940s, to the late 1950s. In his article 'Behind "Borges and I"' of 1973 (324), Yates hints at both the overtness and the covertness of Borges' preoccupation. Yates proceeds from an analysis of 'Borges y yo' of 1957. He traces back this duality to a period in Borges' life between 1924 and 1925. From unpublished material of Borges' notebooks he extracts an autobiographical account of bleak emptiness, entitled 'Boletín de una noche', which is a nightmarish account of a self which Borges feels is vanishing, which is being stripped of all that is exterior or contingent, and with nothing left but nothingness. He draws attention to the fact that after 1925 Borges did not write poetry until much later.

Another notebook of 1940 (Yates 1973, 322) yields an account of the suicide of one of two Borges, of 'the other and real Borges who justifies me in a sufficient but

secret way.' The other Borges being the librarian, the bookworm, who, in an unfinished and unpublished poem of 1940 exchanges the pen for the *revólver* in order 'to find out + know who I am', or, in another version which Borges had posed: 'to verify if I really exist' (Yates 1973, 323). This might serve as another pointer to what Borges meant, in 1932, when he talks about *vida y muerte* in *Discusión*. What Borges seems to be looking for in this death by *revólver*, in this suicide, is to strip away, to kill all that is not truly him, that is not his essence. It is the death to oneself, to his self, which he, in his despair, is hoping to accomplish, conditioned and defined by accidentals such as an occupation, a heritage, an ancestry, all of these fleeting facets which nonetheless define, condition, perhaps imprison. This death to the self would allow Borges to find himself more fully, more truly. The only way Borges sees is to physically and literally kill himself, in order to find his soul, to free his soul.

This despair, which Borges had admitted to Yates, is an expression of a man who longs for, yet cannot ascertain, cannot believe in, has not faith in, yet fathoms the existence of an enduring essence to the self, of a soul, and thus of a higher, spiritual reality into whose existence he feels he can only be admitted in death. So when Yates poses the question as to the overtness of Borges' work as a metaphor of the ineffable (1973, 324), it could be argued that the dual self image may be only one of the things that are left unsaid, and that Borges' search for a soul and with this a spiritual reality is another one of his inexplicit preoccupations which compel a writing which he himself affirmed was driven by 'a deep inner feeling' (Borges 1974, 164-165, cited in Aitken 2001, 84).

Denial of self

The denial of the personal self in 'La nadería de la personalidad' of 1923 is ostensibly prompted by the departure of Borges from a close friend. Both men realise that they might not ever see each other again. The finality of farewell brings vulnerability and leaves those parting from one another exposed and raw to the pain of imminent separation and to the foreknowledge of longing and of loss. At this vulnerable stage, Borges is struck by the nothingness of all that might be called be self: *his* own self. He realises, beyond any doubt, that whatever might constitute his self at the time does not carry forward into the void which this separation is about to

bring. At this stage, an interesting shift can be discerned. Rather than acknowledge the pain of separation, and rather than explore, let alone feel the possibility of a soul which might give cohesion and endurance to all that is fleeting in existence, Borges sublimates it onto an intellectual plane by speculating on the existence or not of the self as such; rather than feeling the pain of the self, and in this particular moment of Borges' life, a wounded self, he denies the self. What would the alternatives be? This denial of what can be called the wounded self remains unacknowledged and forever veiled. It is at the heart of much of Borges' intellectual striving.

This early essay is a crucial text. In it, Borges can be seen to almost visibly make the move from the personal onto the intellectual plane. Here he dares to make explicit the woundedness of his personal sense of self, and visible also is the shifting of personal pain onto something which, as it is an intellectual work - *el arte del pensamiento* - displays, in Murguía's words, *lucidez* and thus depth. This text displays an intensity of feeling, of passion, and of suffering, and thus bears witness to a degree of experience which few critics have acknowledged when they, alongside Borges himself, so easily ascribe his life to the dusty, seemingly impassive realm of the library and the study. There is evidence in these early essays, as well as in other crucial texts of the decades to follow, that Borges lived an intensely passionate life in the sense of depth of feeling and of suffering. It could thus be argued that, rather than a life of absences, of *la vida ausente* which Murguía refers to in relation to Borges' assertion in 1932 in the prologue of *Discusión*, Borges' life was very rich in *vida*, in feeling and in passion. Rather than explore this depth, however, and perhaps the origin of his intensity, Borges, in the public realm which his writing is part of, chose to transfer it onto another, safer though no less intense plane: that of the intellectual analysis of abstracted matters: the nature or nullity of the notion of a self, which is no less intensely lived (because thought, and analysed), but more easily and more freely discussed and explored, because it does not explicitly touch on the personal, and the painful.

Whether it is the actual departure from his friend at that moment in time which causes the transference, or whether it touched on something deeper and previously experienced, perhaps traumatically so, cannot be ascertained from the text itself. What

can be ascertained is that Borges' brief account of his separation from his friend; the realization that they would never see one another again; the anticipation they both felt of the longing and the sense of loss; the young Borges' desire to literally bear his soul, to offer up this aching soul in all its rawness to the gaze of his friend; that all of these display a deeply moving and revealing vulnerability in a young man:

No hay tal yo de conjunto. Allende toda posibilidad de sentenciosa tahurería, he tocado con mi emoción ese desengaño en trance de separarme de un amigo. Retornaba yo a Buenos Aires y dejábale a él en Mallorca. Entrambos comprendimos que salvo en esa cercanía de las cartas, no nos encontraríamos más. Aconteció lo que acontece en tales momentos. Sabíamos que aquel adiós iba a sobresalir en la memoria, y hasta hubo etapa en que intentamos adobarlo, con vehemente despliegue de opiniones para las añoranzas venideras. Lo actual iba alcanzando así todo el prestigio y toda la indeterminación del pasado. Pero encima de cualquier alarde egoísta, voceaba en mi pecho la voluntad de mostrar por entero mi alma al amigo. Hubiera querido desnudarme de ella y dejarla allí palpitante. Seguimos conversando y discutiendo, al borde del adiós, hasta que del golpe, con una insospechada firmeza de certidumbre, entendí ser nada esa personalidad que solemos tasar con tan incompatible exorbitancia. Ocurrióseme que nunca justificaría mi vida un instante pleno, contenedor de los demás, que todos ellos serían etapas provisionarias, aniquiladoras del pasado y encaradas al porvenir, y que fuera de lo episódico, de lo presente, de lo circunstancial, no éramos nadie. Y abominé de todo misteriosismo.

(‘La nadería de la personalidad’, 1923, p.98-99)

This experience made public bears uncanny echoes of Borges' more private account in ‘Boletín de una noche’ of 1924/25¹.

The above passage, especially the first half with its unashamed revelation of love and loss, is strangely at odds with the rest of the essay, which is detached, analytical, scathing in its denunciation of the self, and, more fundamentally so, of its worth(iness). Note also Borges' emphasis on the emotional reality, as well as on the intellectual understanding of this pain: ‘he tocado con mi emoción ese desengaño’, and: ‘hasta que del golpe, con una insospechada firmeza de certidumbre, entendí ser nada esa personalidad que solemos tasar con tan incompatible exorbitancia.’ The need to bear his soul to his friend, and perhaps not only to his friend, is perceived by the young Borges as something beyond egotism, beyond the confines of the self: ‘encima de cualquier alarde egoísta, voceaba en mi pecho la voluntad de mostrar por entero mi alma al amigo.’ Furthermore, there is a tendency to focus on the future (here: the anticipated pain of longing and of absence of a loved one) as forever present. Rather than explore the

¹ Which, as Yates points out, was shortly after Borges returned from Europe to Argentina. The two events, that of parting from his friend in Mallorca in 1923, and the despair expressed in 1924/25 thus seem to be closely linked.

question of what constitutes his essence, Borges denies it. There is also a sense of pain, and of a desire to be seen, recognized, which is something that cannot be seen by the friend, at least not how Borges needs it to be seen. For what he wants to be seen, without seeing or facing it himself, is his innermost self. There is the desire to have his pain recognized without revealing it, neither to the friend nor to himself. This desire for recognition, to be seen in all his woundedness, in all his rawness is the equivalent of the desire of Moon, the traitor in the story 'La forma de la espada' to be seen in all his villainy, which, in his case, reveals his need for redemption.

Following 'La nadería de la personalidad' of 1923, Borges writes 'La encrucijada de Berkeley' and denies the existence of God as the underlying reality of all existence. Thus the years between 1923 and 1925 see Borges articulate his denial of two fundamentals: self and God. Initially, the denial of the self in 1923 is deeply personal (departure from a friend) and acknowledged as such, although there then occurs a shift from the personal to the intellectual. By the writing of 'La encrucijada de Berkeley', the pain of nothingness, or rather of the separation, had been sublimated onto a spiritually abstracted plane, one which it is safe to explore and articulate around. But the focus of all the years of speculation and explorations which are to follow, is always on the self, albeit in a veiled form.

Borges' focus is twofold: on the self and on questions of identity on the one hand, and on notions of temporality on the other, and both are inextricably linked both to one another, and to the notion of the Absolute. Borges' preoccupation with time reveals an ongoing inspection of that which is at the heart of his striving: the inability, yet desire to transcend the realm of the temporary, the temporal, into the eternal, the timeless. For the antidote to time, i.e. to individuation and separation, is eternity, and eternity is an attribute of the Divine, of God. And God corresponds to the healed self, so union of the seeker with God on the visible level corresponds to the union or reconciliation of the wounded or individuated self with the healed or united self. Borges, however, does not make the link between eternity and God, i.e. between the individual self and the soul, which, as soul, partakes in eternity and thus in God, and viceversa. Instead, he focusses on the attribute of eternity, which can be equated with healing, i.e. the gain. This focus on the attribute is to the detriment of the bearer, of

the one who confers eternity, healing, the one from which the gain stems, i.e. God, or, in the analogy, the healed self, which is, in its deepest longing, Borges himself.

In these early essays, Borges argues for the absence or non-existence of God; later, in the mid 1930s, he argues against the doctrines of the Church; later still, in the 1940s, he advances his own version in reply to Nietzsche's Eternal Return; he explores pantheism and mysticism, which is Borges' way of introducing alternatives to, or ways towards the spiritual dimension of Christianity. With 'Sentirse en muerte' in 1928 Borges is deeply struck by his own intimation of the link, the bond between the self and the soul, the individual and the eternal, the union of the one with the other. Ostensibly, the account is one of the experience of a timeless moment, when eternity, or rather timelessness, is deeply felt: 'El momento verdadero de éxtasis y la insinuación posible de eternidad'. But eternity is not only timelessness, or time released; eternity is also the attribute of the Divine, and of the soul. Again, there are two levels discernible in Borges' account: one is the literal, ostensible level of the timeless moment; the other is the analogical, the discreet, where what he might also have experienced, beyond words and even of acknowledgement, is an inkling of a homecoming of the self into the soul, the Divine, the eternal, where all pain of individuation (and temporality) is released. It is an experience of the self which finds itself absorbed in a non-isolated form. And yet, Borges' experience of the timeless moment remains a glimpse because he does not leap in faith, and so this experience is not the mystical, life-transforming one that he is to yearn for all his life. It remains a possibility, never to become an actuality.

Juxtaposed, yet inextricably linked to the notion of eternity is his concern with the paradox in the texts of the late 1920s. The paradox, proposing perpetuity without the Divine, is a metaphor for woundedness. And so, by extension, infinity, that which the paradox is concerned with, that which it perpetrates, and also that which is its crux, is a metaphor for the everlasting woundedness of the self, i.e. the individuated self.

Mystical undercurrents

In the mid 1930s a new focus is introduced with the notion of the eternal recurrence of the same, prompted, in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, by the death of God. That the eternal return, a by-product as it were of the death of God, should be an enduring Borgesian concern, is interesting, for it could be seen as a reoccupation with that very death, i.e. the absence, or loss, of God. Around 1936 Borges can be seen to have reached an impasse in his essayistic explorations, and he turns to writing fictions. His focus on eternity as an attribute of the Absolute, the Divine or Transcendent, becomes ever more apparent, a theme which he is to rework in many different guises and variations; a theme which Borges can be seen to have had already explored in his many references to Bradley and the Absolute. With 'Historia de la eternidad' of 1936 Borges discusses at great length the Church's (ecclesiastical and heretical) concepts of eternity, and he rejects the Platonic notion of eternal Forms.

Yet also, around the same time, with the writing of 'El acercamiento a Almotásim', the theme of knowledge and salvation is taken up again in slight alterations, and with the inclusion of the sub-story 'El coloquio de los pájaros', another mystical dimension is introduced with Sufism. Sufism, being a fusion of Islamic monotheism and pantheistic themes, in the guise of the tale of the birds which features as a footnote in 'El acercamiento a Almotásim'. But Sufi mystics like Al-Ghazzali warn that the pursuit of union and enlightenment must not occur for the sake of the ecstatic union alone, but must arise from one's dedication and submission to God and for him alone. And a close analysis of Borges' rendering of this particular tale revealed how he misses out some vital aspects of the mystical quest. The omission of God can be seen to be lying at the heart of his characters' failures in his stories.

In 1943 Borges picks up his discussion of the Eternal Return, which he had first embarked on in 1934 with 'La doctrina de los ciclos' but advances his own version: eternal recurrence not of the same but of the similar. Here, the interplay and also the tensions between immanence and transcendence, between pantheism and mysticism become discernible. It is in 'El tiempo circular' that he formulates his own,

preferred version of the Eternal Return. It accounts for the Borgesian theme of the version which pervades so much of his work:

Arribo al tercer modo de interpretar las eternas repeticiones: el menos pavoroso y melodramático, pero también el único imaginable. Quiero decir la concepción de ciclos similares, no idénticos.

(‘El tiempo circular’, 1943, p.94)

In the prologue to *Historia de la eternidad* of 1952, Borges comes to embrace Platonic Forms, a view which marks a radical change of attitude from the attitude displayed at the time of originally writing ‘Historia de la eternidad’ in 1936.

In ‘Nueva refutación del tiempo, A’, of 1944, Borges re-iterates his youthful assertion of the nothingness of personality, first voiced in 1922:

Lo repito: no hay detrás de las caras un yo secreto [this was Borges’ assertion in ‘La nadería de la personalidad’], que gobierna los actos y que recibe las impresiones; somos, únicamente, la serie de esos actos imaginarios y de esas impresiones errantes ¿La serie? Negados el espíritu y la materia, que son continuidades, negado también el espacio, no sé qué derecho tenemos a esa continuidad que es el tiempo. [...] Cada instante es autónomo. Ni la venganza ni el perdón ni las cárceles ni siquiera el olvido pueden modificar el invulnerable pasado. No menos vanos me parecen la esperanza y el miedo, que siempre se refieren a hechos futuros; es decir a hechos que no nos ocurrirán a nosotros, que somos el minucioso presente. [...] Consideremos una vida en cuyo descurso las repeticiones abundan: la mía, verbigracia. [recuerdo Luego recuerdo haber recordado ...]. No puedo lamentar la pérdida de un amor o de una amistad sin meditar que sólo se pierde lo que realmente no se ha tenido; [...]. Esas tautologías (y otras que callo) son mi vida entera. Naturalmente, se repiten sin precisión [...]. Sospecho, sin embargo que el número de variaciones circunstanciales no es infinito: podemos postular, en la mente de un individuo (o en dos individuos que se ignoran, pero en quienes se opera el mismo proceso), dos momentos iguales. Postulada esa igualdad, cabe preguntar: Esos momentos idénticos, ¿no son el mismo? ¿No basta un sólo momento repetido para disbaratar y confundir la serie del tiempo? [...].

In the absence of undoing time, or the past (which even the mystic would not claim to be able to do, only to transcend it, and that not by himself, but by the grace of the Divine), there is only redemption or salvation, yet this is exactly what remains elusive. Borges poses the all-too-simple yearning for the time series to be confounded when he says: ‘¿No basta un sólo momento repetido para disbaratar y confundir la serie del tiempo?’. But what is most striking is the shift from the personal to the intellectual. As in the earliest essays of the 1920s, especially ‘La nadería de la personalidad’, Borges, in this later and more mature work, alludes to the deeply personal (*mi vida*), but swiftly, and almost imperceptibly so, moves on to the intellectual and the speculative (the Leibnizian question of the indiscernibility of two identical moments), again

seeking refuge from the personal in the intellectual, but also shifting the reader's focus without obliterating his allusion altogether. This enables the reader to discern Borges' personal anguish without drawing attention to it.

Sólo se pierde lo que realmente no se ha tenido: the loss Borges refers to is all the more keenly felt because it is a loss of something never truly possessed, never timelessly experienced in the then present moment, and as such never timelessly present. Only that which we experience fully in the present moment, with all of our being in the moment, is thus eternalised, never to be lost. The above passage in 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' features several highly significant themes: loss; the impossibility of pardon or redemption; the implacability of all that is; the irreversible nature of time; the eternal repetition of the same in similar versions. But Borges' philosophizing and intellectualizing over the release from temporality masks a much deeper, personal longing: the release from selfness and the concomittant pain which individuation brings. This, significantly so, is followed by his account of the timeless, the eternal, so resistant to being captured by words. 'Sentirse en muerte' concludes with the following words:

Quede pues en anécdota emocional la vislumbrada idea y en la confesa irresolución de esta hoja el momento verdadero de éxtasis y la insinuación posible de eternidad de que esa noche no me fue avara.

(*'Nueva refutación del tiempo, A'*, 1944, p. 240-248)

Yet ecstasy soon gives way to resignation. Borges' revised version of the same essay in 1946 'Nueva refutación del tiempo, B' concludes with the famous words of resignation into the inescapability of time and of selfhood:

El mundo, desgraciadamente, es real; yo, desgraciadamente, soy Borges.

(*'Nueva refutación del tiempo, B'*, 1946, p. 256)

This resignation is followed by the 'Nota al prólogo' of 1952 which features the Buddhist tale of King Milinda's carriage. This text is central to Buddhism and its tenet as to the non-existence of the self, indeed of a soul. It centres on the belief that self is null, and that what we hold to be individually existent, such as individual selves, is really one. 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' also features the epigraphs by Silesius which exhort the reader to proceed from reading to living, to, like Christ, becoming the word.

There thus features in Borges' essayistic writing a wide variety of religious traditions. Says Aitken (2001, 81): '[Borges'] realm of writing is itself a quest, a journey of literary exploration seeking out the meaning of being, searching after truth, after ultimate reality.' and, in his stories, marked references to God, whether as a character or as an Absolute shall be the subject of this analysis. What would the existence of God mean for the individual? The union with the Divine would confer cohesion and meaning and the release from solitude to personal identity; salvation for the individual self. Through it, the cycle of eternally recurring selves and lives would be broken. In Buddhism, this breaking of the cycle could be achieved by achieving *moksa* (release from the cycle of suffering and rebirth brought on by *karma*); in Hinduism, the realisation of the oneness of the soul (*atman*) and the *brahman*. In the monotheistic religions, as expressed in the Cabbalistic wisdom of Judaic tradition, exclusive knowledge confers salvation; in Islam, the recognition of the unity of all being in God; in Christianity, by the recognition of the salvific life of Christ by means of which the individual is redeemed. God means eternity, and eternity means the release from temporality and individuation. Eternity is a Divine attribute; it is also the attribute of the soul. In the monotheistic religions, as well as in Hinduism, yet not in Buddhism (which denies the concept of an individual soul), the way in which the individual can partake in God and in eternity is through the recognition of the soul as a manifestation of the Divine. Borges does not make the link, nor indeed the leap of faith between the attribute - which he yearns for and whose existence he recognizes, albeit forever elusive - and the one from whom or to whom the attribute 'belongs': God.

Although Borges edges ever more towards an apprehension (or in any case a longing for) eternity (equivalent to the Divine, healing), and attributes to the attainment of eternity as a mental state and the apprehension of all the releasing and liberating effects as recounted over and over in 'Sentirse en muerte', and as attained by the mystics (release from individuation and temporality), he does not make the leap to perceiving that eternity is a Divine attribute, that only God (or any other Divine Being, the Absolute), and the soul, have the capacity to display 'eternity' as a characteristic, to be of that eternal state. The only way in which the human being can partake in being in eternity is by faith in God; by the belief that the soul is united with

the eternal Being. Boethius defines eternity as ‘the total, simultaneous and absolute possession of unlimited life’. This contrasts with the Borgesian theme of immortality, which is one of the guises of infinity, and of the abhorred notion of perpetuity. Without the concept or the acknowledgement of, or the belief in God (analogically, faith in healing or a healed self), there cannot be an eternity, nor can there be healing.

There is thus a juxtaposition, or tension between time (and its concomitant, infinity) and eternity; between the individuated self and the soul; between the Nietzschean notion of the eternal recurring of the same (in the Borgesian version of the recurrence of similar, as opposed to identical cycles) and the ‘homecoming’ (Christian) or nothingness of self / ‘dissolution’ (Buddhist) of the illusory concept of enduring self or eternal soul, thus releasing and at the same time harbouring the individual. Unity of all being in God (Islam); union or sameness of *atman* and *brahman* (Hindu).

A discussion between the link, but also the fundamental distinction between belief and faith might yield an insight into Borges’ search for God, for a spiritual union. It will also reveal the link between faith and knowledge (see Tennant 1989). Let us proceed from a definition of God to the distinction between belief and faith. What is the link between the desire to find God, or how proof of God is linked to the capacity to believe. Is proof needed in order to proceed to belief? And also: is it possible to proceed from seeming or supposed evidence of God to God himself? In elucidation we might look at a definition of God, and tie in an analysis of the distinction between belief and faith. Definitions of God state that God is not an object among objects, nor the conclusion of an argument. That means that if a seeker sets out to experience the Divine like an object, i.e. with the senses, or by reason alone, then that quest is destined for doom from the outset. There is no object God to be experienced, nor a conclusion as to the existence of God to be reached (Bowker 1997, 378):

The absolute and real who is, than which nothing greater can be conceived, the unproduced Producer of all that is, without whom nothing that is could be or could remain in being; or, alternatively, the projection into supposed reality of human fears, neurosis, and abject needs (Freud), or of human ideals which can never be realized (Feuerbach), or of the requirements to perpetuate the conditions of alienation in the interests of some party (Marx) [...]. The possibility of so wide a contrast between theistic realism and psychological unrealism arises because God (supposing God is)

is not an object among objects in a universe, able to be discovered and / or explored, as are atoms, [...]. Nor is God the conclusion of an argument, although argument points to the probability of God at least in the sense that the universe makes more sense if it exists as a consequence of one who produces and sustains it, than otherwise. [...] Since God cannot be produced as an object among objects, and since God is, whether this or any other universe happens to exist, it follows that God cannot be described in language, since God is far apart from humanly apprehended categories in time and space (i.e. is transcendent). [...] Theistic religions have always been aware of the inadequacy of human language about God, and of the way in which people are prone to project onto God their own ideas and programmes. When people worship as God that which is less than God, this issues in idolatry [...].

The first of the fallacies, i.e. to seek to experience God, or his attributes, like an object among objects, is the one which Borges' characters succumb to in those stories, such as 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'El Aleph', 'La escritura del Dios', which feature a quest as a result of apparent evidence of a Divine design. The second fallacy, the desire to reach God by way of deduction, inference, or reasoning is the one which Borges had displayed in his essayistic writing. To attain belief in any one of the above described manners is thus not possible. It cannot be sustained, nor indeed can it be gained in the first place. Only with the mental and spiritual disposition towards belief, or, as shall be argued, towards faith, can the orientation towards the goal / the actual experience be overcome. By living as if the faith creation were real, actual experience, and knowledge may be gained. To embark on a quest for the Divine, or for Divine attributes, such as ultimate knowledge ('La biblioteca de Babel'), eternity ('Sentirse en muerte'), omnipotence ('La escritura del Dios'), or omniscience ('El Aleph') in the absence of faith has consequences for the self both in an abstract, philosophical sense, but also in a more personally pertinent sense, i.e. for the personal self of Borges. To attain a spiritual dimension, such as the notion of a Divine, would release the individual from the constraints and the loneliness of individuation, and would curb fragmentation. To not attain such a spiritual dimension, or to strive for the 'prize' alone, means the continual individuation and fragmentation of the self.

How, or why may one be looking for God without already having faith? It might be argued that Borges', and his characters', failure is rooted in the tension between belief and faith, between the seeming evidence and the Divine itself. And any evidence which Borges and his characters seem to come upon is fraught, insufficient, elusive, and malign. Another obstacle is that their quests are goal-

oriented. See the following excerpt from Tennant's 'The Nature of Belief' (quoted in Penelhum 1989, 99-100) :

The word 'faith' [...] has been used down the ages to the present day [...] as a synonym for religious belief. In other words, faith and belief have been regarded almost universally as identical. There is a need, however, for the term 'faith' in addition to 'belief', in order to give a name to an attitude of mind which is akin to belief yet distinct from it. Both terms signify mental states or acts belonging to the cognitive side of experience, but while 'belief' emphasises almost exclusively the intellectual element in assent, and has reference to an objective situation, 'faith' rather lays stress on the conative factor of the subjective attitude. Belief is more or less constrained by fact or actuality which already exists in complete independence of any desiring or striving on our part, and which in some degree compels our assent. Faith, as it is here conceived, is, on the other hand, not concerned with actuality that is or was, but with the possible, which may or may not prove to be actual. Belief is assent to data, faith, in the first instance, is not confronted with data, but creates its objects, which are ideas [...]. By practical activity, or living as if its ideal creations were also real, faith may go on to discover their actuality. Though not knowledge, it is possibly, and often actually, a step toward knowledge, and to knowledge otherwise unattainable.

Evidence of a Divine design which Borges delineates in 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'La lotería en Babilonia', 'El acercamiento a Almotásim', is linked more to believing than to faith. Borges' rendering of Silesius too betrays a certain omission of God: to miss out the monotheistic, religious framework of Silesius' work also means an incomplete reading of Silesius' work. In doing so, Borges ignores the *one* 'component', all-important 'ingredient' to all mystical experience, the ultimate source and aim of the mystic's search: God. God as the supreme, transcendental reality, not G/god as merely identical with the material reality. Silesius warns against a self that is not rooted in God. This is a distinction which is mirrored in that drawn between the notion of 'the real' (transcendental) and ordinary reality.

The only Borgesian text which displays an attempt at actual transcendence of the yoke of time and the painful process of individuation is 'Sentirse en muerte', an autobiographical experience which Borges is to recount over three decades. Yet the experience remains a fleeting glimpse, an intimation only of timelessness. It does not carry Borges into a true mystical experience of transcendence. It is a 'teaser' as it were, neither lasting, nor mystical, nor transcending. Borges gives a particular rendering to the mystical texts which he recounts and alludes to time and time again. These texts, in Borges' reworking or at least in his presentation, are furthermore characterised by the omission, wrought by Borges himself, of the very essence of all

mystical experience: the existence and immediate experience of God. A fine example of this omission of God can be found in Borges' rendering of the mystical tale 'El coloquio de los pájaros' within 'El acercamiento a Almotásim'². Placed outside the main body of text in a footnote, Borges hones in on the seventh stage, the Valley of death, leaving out the third and the fifth stages, the Valleys of Intuitive knowledge, and the Valley of Unification. Let us look more closely at the stages and at what precisely Borges left out:

- Stage 2. The Valley of Love: criticising mystical indulgence and lack of connectedness with humanity, and with God as the ultimate aim
- Stage 3. The Valley of Intuitive Knowledge: the pilgrim's heart receives directly the illumination of Truth and an experience of God
- Stage 5. The Valley of Unification: the seeker understands that what seemed to him different things and ideas are, in actuality, only one

And even in focusing on the last of the stages, on the oneness of all being, Borges omits the singularity of the individual. This notion of the diversity within unity is also at the heart of the trinitarian Mystery. It is the essence of all monotheistic religions, yet Borges gives it a pantheistic slant. He also omits the notion of God as the supreme unifying force.

- Stage 7. The Valley of Death: 'The Seeker understands the mystery, the paradox, of how an individual drop can be merged with an ocean, and still remain meaningful. He has found his "place"' (Idries 1964, 110)

Borges' notion of the Divine is at the heart of an understanding of his texts, both the essays and the stories. Although in Borges' stories God frequently appears, he more than often is treated as a character only; so although God is present as a name, *Dios*, *Allah*, *el Korán*, this presence remains a name, a reference, only; what is left out is the actual spiritual dimension itself which would lend it reality, which might be arrived at by faith, belief, or practice.

Borges projects onto his characters the absences of his own life and of his ultimately unresolved speculations. Although his characters (more often than not in first person) *do* in part aspire to a union with a higher Being, with a God of sorts, they

² Note that even within the story, the reviews appear as fragmented or lost manuscripts.

also always fail in their quest for transcendence. This is exemplified by 'El Aleph', 'El Zahir', and 'La escritura del Dios'. In Borges' stories there are a variety of God notions: the leveller, the obliterator, the avenger, the magician, the maddener, etc. This is one of Borges' paradigms worked in every variant in slightly different ways. Where God *is* explicitly present, he is, always fatally so, contained in, and thus identical with, a material object (a coin, the aleph, a labyrinth; etc.). Borges thus displays a fraught concept of the immanence of the Divine; in his rendering, immanence is more akin to magic than to any truly Divine presence. God also features as the leveller of all opposites and antagonisms, such as in 'Los teólogos', yet not in order to point to salvation, but rather to point to the futility of human striving. Where there *is* a union of the self with a Divine source, it is flawed or temporary. And those stories which neither display nor aspire to an underlying reality or God at all, are characterized by one constant: nullification. Nullification of the text; of the author/narrator; and lastly - as there is a tendency of Borges' characters to become one with another, either in obliteration or in the attempt at confirming individual identity - nullification of the self.

There is in Borges a tension between time (infinity) and eternity, between the self and the notion of a soul, between fragmentation and unity. Several critics have considered Borges' theological stance, amongst them Paoli who argues that Borges leans towards pantheism as well as atheism and gnosticism (1992, 202-203 and 207-208). Arana acknowledges Borges' quest for a God but holds that Borges cannot find God because of the notion of infinity. Arana feels that Borges blames God for the existence of evil and therefore banishes him into non-existence (1994, 83 and 97).

It can be argued that Borges cannot overcome infinity because he cannot make the leap from time to eternity. In the absence of a higher, or Divine, order chaos ensues in the form of fragmentation: identity proliferates, multiplies, disintegrates. This affects the identity *of* a given text within Borges' story, and may indeed challenge the (personal) identity (of the character, narrator, and author) through the multiplicity of fragmented texts. This process of fragmentation occurs in time, worldly and illusory in nature, and infinite in Borges' particular notion of time; more precisely: obliteration of the one fixed identity and the ensuing fragmentation into an

array of identities, textual and personal, occurs in infinite time, either linear or cyclical; a Borgesian preoccupation familiar from his essayistic writing of the late 1920s and early-mid 1930s in *Discusión* and *Historia de la eternidad*.

Self and God

The God which emerges from Borges' stories can be seen as an expression of, and a metaphor for the wounded self on the one hand, and also of the wounding self on the other. The notion of God in Borges' stories is damaged; but then so is his notion of a self, and, more pertinently so, of the 'healed' self: it is not a truly healed self, but one which had dared to open itself up for examination and exploration and had been defeated, cheated, betrayed; Borges' skewed notion of God is an expression of his fear of failure, his fear at opening himself. So, the visions of a cruel, arbitrary God are at once a reflection of his fearful desire to be healed and of not having faith.

The God figure that Borges delineates in his stories is, on the one hand the supposed saving figure, although that salvation is never arrived at, and on the other hand God is the one who punishes. If then the God figure, the God character in the stories is to be equated with the self, then it follows that the self, the personal self of Borges, i.e. Borges himself is both the one who might save, and also the one who might punish, or fail to save. This reveals a fundamental tension and irreconcilable division within Borges, never conclusively being one, and never uniting the two: saviour and the one saved, the one saving and the one condemning or failing. A fundamental fear of himself becomes apparent, the fear not only of failing in the quest, but failing himself, a failure inflicted by himself on himself. What thus emerges is a painfully torn, divided self. Thus Borges recognizes that the power is in him, and this responsibility is perceived of as threatening. Borges is afraid to be damaged again, this time by himself, by the very power within that has the potential of healing but also the potential of further damage and failure.

Yates' reference to 'Boletín de una noche' serves as his focus for what he perceives is Borges' Idealism (1973). From this account of being and of dissolving into blackness, i.e. annihilation, it becomes evident that for Borges, nothingness of identity was always desperately personal, pertinent, and real, that the bleak

nothingness of selfhood was more than an interesting philosophical speculation, that it had for Borges not only an intellectually horrifying aspect, but a deeply emotional one as well. In those personal accounts of Borges', both in 'La nadería de la personalidad' as well as in 'Boletín de una noche', the self can be seen not so much to fragment, but rather to be utterly annihilated. The nothingness of selfhood, and the horror it entails for Borges, is only in words akin to the Buddhist notion of the liberating nothingness of self. For Borges, nothingness of selfhood is terrifying, threatening; in the Buddhist conception, it is liberating. This might be contrasted with the Christian notion of emptiness to allow for the true self to emerge, i.e. the self which is at one, or rather: the self which is the presence of God, of the Divine within.

In the tragically futile quest for the transcendence of time and perpetuity into the forever elusive realm of the eternal and Divine, it is the attribute of infinity which is most crucial to Borges' exploration. Infinite time is perpetual, either linearly or cyclically (recurringly) so. Infinitely linear time, coupled with what Borges had borrowed from Nietzsche³ leads to the repetition of all that ever was and is (in Borges' interpretation of the doctrine, not a precise repetition of the same, but a repetition of similar, non-identical experiences). The circularity and perpetuity in many of his stories bear echoes of this doctrine which greatly preoccupies Borges and had led him, in a creative interpretation of the idea in 'La doctrina de los ciclos' of 1934, and in 'El tiempo circular' of 1943, to forward his own particular version of '*repetición de experiencias similares, no idénticas*'. It is the aspect of similarity of the same which is crucial here, for it accounts for the Borgesian theme of the 'version': versions of both the text itself (note: the multiple, varying 'editions' in stories such as 'El acercamiento a Almotásim', etc.); versions of the identity of the author-narrator (note: the predominance of first-person narrations to that effect with their multiple, embedded narratorial voices⁴); and versions of the personal self of the protagonist,

³ The idea of Eternal Recurrence is (Tanner 1997, 403):

Based on the fact that if the number of atoms in the universe is finite, they must reach a configuration that they have been in before, and that will inevitably result in the history of the universe repeating itself.

The dismay caused by this idea, apart from the horror of repeating every mistake and every pain infinitely over, lies, as Milan Kundera observes, in the absence of '*the mitigating circumstance of the transitory nature of things*' (quoted in Tanner, 1997, 405).

⁴ There are a variety of first-person narrators 1. He is a 'Borges' author-character and teller of a tale in which he himself is involved as a writer-character; 2. He is a 'Borges' author-character and the teller of someone else's tale (to whom, in some cases, he then hands over the narration, which is subsequently told in another first person voice), or the reviewer of someone else's work; 3. The narrator is

who often appropriates the notion of the 'version' to alter his own past, death, or life; in other words: his identity.

In his stories Borges exposes different ways of blurring personal identity, which is another Borgesian paradigm: to change or hide a shameful past, or history, or one's own death in an attempt to redeem a sin, a guilt, a failure. But redemption, in the absence of a true redeeming figure, is not attainable, as a close analysis of 'La otra muerte', 'La forma de la espada', and 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' - where the focus is on the fragmentation and the nullification of the self - shall reveal. In the absence of, or a transcendence into a higher, spiritual reality - or in the face of the impossibility or unattainability of God - the fragmentary process wielded by time knows no bounds, and whatever gets subjected to it - be that the text, the character or the author - undergoes a potentially endless process of variations, multiplications, nullifications. The fragmentation (chaos, flux, multiplicity) of the text itself (the text proposed by the story) has implications for the identity of the author-character of the text within the story, as well as posing questions concerning the identity of the author-narrator of the story (see eg. 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', 'El inmortal', 'El fin'), more often than not a 'Borges' figure of sorts. This kaleidoscope of roles and assignments is a manifestation of fragmented identities, both personal and textual. The obliterating process of selfhood, authorship and textual identity (or integrity) occurs in time, which is defined as worldly and illusory in nature. Time, with its aspect of infinite perpetuity is likened to hell by Borges ('La duración del Infierno', 1929). The same parallel is drawn by Silesius (*The Cherubic Wanderer*, Book 5:74, quoted in Shradly 1986, 30) when he likens infinite time to hell on the one hand, and eternity to God on the other:

Reflect on this with care: God is Eternity
With the devil in hell, eternal time will be.

Time is infinite in Borges' particular perception; more precisely: obliteration, nullification, or in any case fragmentation and multiplicity of the text occur either in linear or in cyclical time, a notion which is to Borges both fascinating and horrifying.

anonymous and refers someone else's tale; 4. He is the protagonist of his own story (not a 'Borges' character!). Then there are the two types of third person narrators: 1. The narrator is anonymous and recounts someone else's tale, that character then taking on the first person narration; 2. The narrator is anonymous and tells a tale unrelated to himself.

Linear perpetuity in the stories is manifest in the abyss of the progressus, or regressus, ad infinitum. In perhaps one of the most revealing passages of the story 'El acercamiento a Almotásim' a footnote, and as such placed outside the main body of the text and perhaps more significantly so, outside of Borges' own experience, to the mystical story 'Coloquio de los pájaros' suggests that God is the shadow of another God. This is a prose translation of the notion of gnosis, which is ultimate knowledge for the select, forever in search of yet another. It is also the story of seeking refuge, and of revelation which is being withheld from the reader, and possibly the seeker, on the very threshold, the imminence of revelation.

Waking from the illusory empirical world into a reality where we realize that we have been dreaming, is useless, because the underlying Reality, even if there was one, is inaccessible to us, we cannot experience it; we are in a no-man's-land, somehow worse off than before: woken up from the dream, yet left outside Reality, which is the fate Tzinacán suffers in the story 'La escritura del Dios'. Waking from the dream (or slumber) does not reveal Reality, only the knowledge that our supposed reality (the dream) is not real.

In 'Las ruinas circulares', the fire which does not consume the God dreamed up by the protagonist suggests to him that he himself is the product of another man's dream, who himself had been dreamed up by a dreamer, and so on in a regressing, infinite spiral of 'linear circularity'. 'La biblioteca de Babel' introduces the enticing certainty of a Book of books, yet cruelly also confronts the searcher with the next to zero chance of ever finding it in anyone's lifetime. This is reminiscent of the mathematical problem which was given a prose translation by Zeno in his paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise: by dividing a fraction ever more to reach zero, which it never does, while edging ever closer to zero. Thus the search goes on into infinite time, and only *with* infinite time at hand could the searcher find the Book in the library which is *ilimitada y periódica*, infinite and recurring.

Flux and change of supposedly stable entities like author, text and personal identity are indicative of a universe where anything and anyone may undergo alterations to their identity. This is so because the particular temporal frame is that of time in the Silesian sense. Time, worldly and illusory as the mystics understand it,

gives rise to the fragmentary and unreal and is taken to its logical extremes by Borges. Time bears the illusion of an individuated self, cut loose from its eternal and uniting origin. Borges puts a twist on this process of individuation (of cutting loose from the origin) and takes it to extremes in that the individuation which his texts, characters and the very concept of authorship itself (i.e. origin) undergo, culminate in a fragmentation which is almost literal, and which occurs in infinite time, linear or cyclical: multiple authors to one and the same text ('Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'), endless versions of anyone's life written down in elusive tomes ('La biblioteca de Babel'); potentially endless variations to any piece of literature ('El fin'); countless twists on personal destinies by a random lottery system ('La lotería en Babilonia'); creative re-interpretations of personal lives and pasts ('La otra muerte', 'Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto', 'El Sur').

As there is no transcendence to the realm of the eternal, the unitary, the trinitarian, the orderly, the Divine, what ensues is fragmentation and alienation, and there are a host of stories from *Ficciones* and *El Aleph* which each introduce a different means of blurring the notion of the fixed identity of the very text, author or character suggested in the story itself. Textual as well as narratorial, authorial and personal multiplicity are all subject to the fragmenting process which ensues in the absence of a higher, transcending, possibly Divine reality.

But Borges' preoccupation with notions of self and identity is not so much the expression of a philosophical or intellectual interest (which can be seen as the obvious or visible level), but rather an expression of a deeply personal need, a psychological anguish (the veiled or unacknowledged level). The notion of infinity, which entails the fragmentation of self, and the notion of the Divine as Borges understands it, are expressions of woundedness. Mysticism and the exploration of religious-spiritual ideas are metaphors for Borges' desire to make whole an incomplete, damaged, personal self. Borges' interest, as evidenced by the nature of his characters' quests, is not in becoming a mystic or even spiritually enlightened, because Borges, as do his characters, misses out the central focal point of all mystical quests: the encounter with God as an end in itself. Why is this so? Because Borges uses the quest as a metaphor.

Why be so obvious? Because he lays the clues to his own strategy and thus reveals a fundamental desire to be caught out. This is a paradox *à la* Borges.

His preoccupation is rather more self-interested. It is about the lack of self-fulfillment, or self-improvement, and completeness are the gains (never actually got). This quest of his is ultimately self-defeating, and perhaps it is meant to be exactly that: for to reach an end the end i.e. the gain, would mean to have exhausted the metaphor, and then what would take its place? The psyche recoils from such danger and resorts to clever means by which the conclusion can be delayed, forever and ever so if necessary; delayed at least until the self can recognize his woundedness and can confront whatever lies at the heart of that pain, previously unacknowledged even as such. Borges' interest is in philosophical and spiritual matters, and his highly intellectual approach is a kind of escapism or compensation for unbearable, unacknowledged pain and woundedness, a transference onto a safe, grand plane of exploration which allows him to articulate something which, in its core, in itself, is too painful to acknowledge, let alone mention; it allows him to explore the metaphor and to make sense of something without having to confront the source/real issue: which is the wounded self and possibly the events, trauma, thoughts, feelings that inflicted the wound.

Intellectual exploration and reasoning takes the place of emotional turmoil and rationalization of the metaphor is a way to avoid, and at the same time explore, the emotional-personal. By exploring the metaphor, he escapes and postpones the moment of truth or realization and confrontation of the real issues. It is less painful, less exposing to explore the metaphor and share it with a public than to confront a possible real trauma. The exploration of the metaphor severs the link and the origin of what gave rise to the quest: the sense of incomplete personal self and the causes of the woundedness. So in a sense the metaphor is useful in that it allows Borges to explore related themes and to transfer his aspirations onto a safe plane, where he can articulate and explore without the danger, but also without the benefit, of touching on the real pain, but at the same time it is not an exploration of the real pain and so delays any possible healing process.

Borges yearns for a sense of wholeness, reality, meaning, passion. He desires to be anything and anybody but himself. So he seeks refuge in the grand idea of mystical exploration and truth, mysticism leading to the very elements missing from his life: wholeness, reality, meaning, and passion. His quest is about God and union with God, but it is also about himself and his wounded sense of selfness; as such, Borges' explorations are, at least partially, compensatory, for the exploration of the metaphor does serve the purpose of encircling, without touching on the real issue, the true wound, and thus, one day, enables Borges to dare to confront the origin of his hurt. This might help to explain why Borges' spiritual quest does not fulfill itself and so mirrors his unfulfilled personal quest.

Infinity, which is the ultimate consequence of the implacability of time, is in Borges' writing an expression equivalent to unending pain and self-denial. In his desire to reveal himself, Borges, as early as the 1920 with 'La nadería de la personalidad', affirms a wish to be seen, to be recognized in all his being and wounded soul which he himself cannot look at, let alone love; so he desires the friend to see, and to see more than he himself is able to. Borges' desire is to have his pain recognized, *ser visto* (Navarro 1996), to be revealed to another without seeing himself, thus abdicating personal power and responsibility. Eternity, on the other hand, is a metaphor for healing, for God, for the healer and the healing self. As such, the spiritual quest itself corresponds to a personal recognition of some kind of trauma.

God, and Borges' perception of God, correspond to the healed self: because he yearns for yet is barred from grasping the sense of wholeness of the self, Borges' vision of God is incomplete or fraught. His notion of the Divine as the healing agent can be understood also as a metaphor for himself. This is the longed and searched for self in its wholeness and plenitude, yet Borges can nonetheless not believe in it. His vision of himself, and of the Divine, remains ambivalent.

Yates (1973) points out the split of selves within Borges, the duplication of identity into Borges the literary and public figure, and Borges the librarian and civilian. He seems to argue for a division of more or less public roles he feels that Borges is orchestrating. But it could be said that what the division is really about is the self itself which is deeply divided in its innermost being; a being who is not at

one, neither with himself nor with a higher Being; this in turn is at the heart of the unstable and multiple identities of his characters.

Yet Borges, I would argue, does not yearn for the absence of self, nor even for the absence of his own incomplete self. He rather yearns for the healing, the acceptance, the love of the self by himself; and this is why he cannot reconcile himself with the Buddhist notion of the no-self.

There is a tension between the accidental and the essential self, i.e. a tension between the individual self and the soul. On the analogical level, this corresponds to a tension between the wounded, isolated, incomplete self that emerges in Borges' essays and his stories, and the yearning for a whole, complete, unified self. There is a further tension: it is that between solitude and salvation, between woundedness and healing. Borges sublimates the wounded sense of personal self onto an intellectual plane. The spiritual quest for union is inextricably linked to the personal quest for healing. It is also linked to the desire to make complete a fragmented self.

There are thus three levels to Borges' texts: the first is the obvious, the theme of the story or the argument of the essay; the second is the discreet level which is the quest for God and for plenitude of self within its individuality; the third is the veiled, the underlying, the metaphorical: it is the personal sense of failure and of woundedness, of fragmentation and loss of identity. In the stories where a God is made explicit, a very damaged vision or understanding of God emerges; this skewed image of God corresponds to the skewed image of a healed self: God is viewed distortedly, and so is the self.

God corresponds to the possibility of healing, but none of the stories offer this healing vision: The God of 'La lotería' is an arbitrary, random force; that of 'La biblioteca' is forever elusive; the God's eye vision of 'El Aleph' is destructive; the glimpse of the Divine in 'El Zahir' is maddening; the deciphered 'name' and, as Tzinacán had hoped, power of the Almighty in 'La escritura del Dios' is self-destroying and numbing, leaving the high priest indifferent both to himself and to that which he had glimpsed; the God which levels out all antagonies in 'Los teólogos' is not a harmonizing force, but one which renders the struggles and agonies of the two

priests futile and meaningless; the God of the city of the immortals in 'El inmortal' is one of a Creator who has excused himself of his creation. These latter gods of 'El inmortal' are perhaps the most soul rendering of them all: the creators have abandoned their world, leaving chaos in the wake of creation. The divinity, in its multiplicity of gods, once there, and now gone. Perhaps worse than the destructive, annihilating Gods of the other stories, these gods are the most destructive of them all, because knowledge of the Divine and its existence does not bring salvation, only an inerradicable pain and misery at the knowledge of Divine indifference and desertion. Loneliness and abandonment ensue.

There is also the God-image of Borges' stories which could be equated with love, a woman's love ('El Aleph'), magic ('El Zahir'), the writing ('La escritura del Dios'), privileged knowledge ('La escritura del Dios'). The women in those stories correspond to the objects in his stories, in that the unrequited love for them is externalised. The woman is the external force, the god, the coin, etc.

On the analogical level, if one is to equate the accomplished union with God with the union of the wounded and the newly-found healed self, then the damaged notion of God in the stories could be seen as the consequences of a fraught quest for healing, the risks, as it were, of embarking on a journey of recognition and of healing, but a healing which does not happen. It is an expression of Borges' fear and doubt about wholeness (belief, faith). It is the lesson the wounded self, subconsciously so, is teaching itself before even setting off on the painful task of recognition, confrontation and recovery. It thus prevents itself from ever embarking on that journey at all, by depicting, articulating in its veiled form the all too dreadful and seemingly risky and inescapable consequences.

On the visible level, the fraught quest for the union with God reveals a painfully experienced difficulty in reaching faith, union or salvation, the fundamental unbelief in God (saviour); on the metaphorical level, it reveals a fundamental unbelief in healing (salvation) and a fear of rejection and of abandonment, in short: the fear of failure. It reveals also a belief in eternity, the Divine attribute, which is analogous to plenitude. But Borges' vision of the Divine itself appears to remain unfulfilled.

The following analogies between the metaphorical and the discreet levels emerge:

God	Whole self
at one with the seeker	at one with the wounded self
faith	recognition of need to be healed
discovery	confrontation
spiritual path	recovery
seeker	wounded self

Alternatively, eternity may also correspond to the soul and ultimately to God; whereas infinity corresponds to the self and to time. Partaking of the temporal in the eternal is through faith in a higher, Divine reality. The tension between immanence and transcendence corresponds to the tension between immediate healing, the miracle cure on the one hand, and an unveiling of the underlying reasons for the need for healing on the other.

The stories with a damaged or skewed God image act as a warning to the wounded, subconscious self to not let itself become vulnerable by seeking salvation or union, i.e. healing. It can also be held that in his stories Borges warns, albeit implicitly and perhaps unacknowledged, against the modern, materialistic interpretation of mystic pursuits as a means to self-improvement. This is analogous to the second Valley in the mystical tale which criticises the mystic who pursues enlightenment for the sake of enlightenment alone, who indulges in his ecstasy, and not for God as the ultimate reason for his or her quest. And one may further ask whether Borges may not warn himself against embarking on the quest for healing; or possibly draw attention to his own approach.

In the stories, there is no accomplished transcendence or union with the God(head), only the yearning for it (implied or explicit, yet always flawed). It is only and exclusively in the extra-fictional texts, and in particular in the mystics' epigrams, that the presence of God, and the union in him, is present and accomplished. There is furthermore a tension in his stories between knowledge and experience. Knowledge is attainable through faith, and experience through living faith creations *as if* they were real. Borges is denied both.

This seems to underline what Silesius had urged the reader, the searcher to do: to abandon reading, and writing, and to begin to experience the spiritual reality which Borges, and all his characters, are barred from yet long for. There is no salvation in philosophical speculations, and neither is there refuge in the theological probings of his essays, nor indeed is there hope in the pursuit of writing about experiencing transcendence from time and selfhood. The only salvation is in the actual experience. This remains an elusive experience, never attained by any of Borges' characters, nor indeed by Borges himself.

Inextricably linked to this is Borges' deployment of the paradox and the labyrinth. The paradox, itself a perpetrator of infinity (that is of perpetuity without the Divine) is a means by which we build the stumble stones into the fabric of our constructed universe, mental or emotional, by means of which we also realize the futility of our system. Borges' 'system' is the exploration of philosophies and spiritualities with a view to knowledge and enlightenment, yet underlying all this is the desire to be made one with a higher reality, to become whole, and yet remain unique. The paradox is also, on a deeper level still, a metaphor for the perpetual, unrelieved tension between Borges' sense of the nothingness of his self, and the desire to be contained in an Absolute. This tension is what I term woundedness. In other words: infinity - that which the paradox is concerned with, that which it perpetrates, and also that which is its crux - is a pointer to Borges' metaphor.

Borges sets up his own *intersticios de sinrazón*, a metaphor for unending separation and ever-spiralling fragmentation. Like Nolan in 'Tema del traidor y del héroe', he also uses the paradox as a strategy to point to himself and his own flawed approach. His omission of God is, on close analysis, rather obvious and thus can be seen as an attempt, albeit subconsciously so, to draw attention to this 'flaw'. The paradox is the very means by which our attention is drawn to the fissures of our logic, by means of which we realize the artificiality and the unfathomable nature of the construct which we deem is reality, self, time, etc.; so the paradox is a pointer, just like Borges inserts pointers to his own approach. These are logical pointers and accessible through logic, the result of which is the recognition that without faith (love

of the fragmented self) and without a spiritual as well as personal journey there can be no gain, no eternity, and no complete self.

Borges desires to reach the spiritual goal (eternity, sense of wholeness) and so focuses on the attribute, the gain, which is eternity. This is to the detriment of the one to whom eternity is attributed, i.e. God, who corresponds to the healed self, which, ultimately, is Borges. This desire of Borges and of his characters to reach the spiritual goal without going all of the spiritual way is a pointer; it is accessible to the reader, perhaps that 'reader' of Borges is not Borges himself, but his desire to see and to be seen is subtly evident; the desire also to be revealed in this very fraught quest. It is as if Borges recognizes and also makes explicit his own 'strategy'; as if he articulated his own tactics of compensation, substitution and transference; in fact, as if he, less rather than more openly showed the futility not only of his characters' but also of his own enterprise. He appears to be drawing attention to the shortcomings of his characters' approach, and so draws attention to the shortcomings of his own approach.

Borges is so the author of his journeys, both the metaphorically minded ones - intellectual, philosophical, spiritual - and the personal ones pertinent to his sense of selfhood. He is, as it were, the path-planner and the path-layer and the path-finder all in one. But Borges is also the maze-layer, and the one inserting the pointers to the heart, and ultimately to the exit of his own maze.

Chapter V From the Possibility of God to the Fragmentation of the Self

The Presence or Possibility of God: Failed Quest

The constants in the stories of *Ficciones* and *El Aleph* are flux, oscillation, and non-fixity. Yet far from creating a disparate, disjointed picture of Borges' fictional output, the *ficciones*, manifold and diverse as they may be, are connected. The stories form a whole which, while evolving linearly, individually forever return to their point of departure. Throughout the essayistic work as well as the fictional work of three decades spanning the early 1920s to the early 1950s, Borges is engaged in a process of oscillation, both within individual stories, and amongst various stories, or texts. Borges' texts are torn between the absence of and the desire for an underlying, absolute reality; between the union with a Divine and the failure to find the spiritual; between the absence of an underlying Godhead, and the union of the self with God; between the nullification of the self and its affirmation in the Divine; between time and eternity.

The relation between texts is one of oscillation: oscillation between accomplishment and desire for union (ultimately failed), and between accomplishment and nullification. The chronology for the stories is thus less linear, and more oscillating than the chronology which is discernible in his essayistic writing. A pattern of constant oscillation between the quest for a union, and the fragmentation of the self becomes evident.

The stories are a continuum from those essays where Borges explored the themes of the quest for personal self affirmation, and notions of Godhood, and of time. Temporality, as conceived by Borges, and the mystics alike, is immanent to the thisworldly, and is juxtaposed to eternity, which is an attribute of the Divine or Absolute. Unlike the mystics, however, Borges does not connect eternity, an experience of which he longs for, and the Divine. Indirectly, however, Borges can be seen to lean towards that very connection, in his exploration of different types of God.

An exploration which, although it does not lead his characters to transcendence, does yet offer glimpses, or possibilities, forever, however, elusive. There is thus in his stories a tension between time and eternity, between immanence and transcendence, and also between knowledge and experience.

In the following definition of eternity, the link between time and eternity, the Divine, and the soul becomes apparent (Bowker 1997, 320):

Not a long time, since 'eternity' does not enter into the dimension of time. Brahman and God have been thought of as 'being' of that eternal state, where there is no passing of time, although the passing of time is simultaneously present to Brahman / God. Thus Boethius defined eternity as [...] 'the total, simultaneous and absolute possession of unlimited life'. Although this is the definitional truth of Brahman / God, it is also the possible perfection of the human atman / soul, because already it participates in eternity - atman because it is no other than Brahman, the soul because the expression of the human mind is outside spatial and temporal definition, however much at present (i.e. in time) it is correlated with both. [...].

Consequently, where the notion of time reigns, there is infinity, which brings multiplicity or fragmentation of identity. Just like eternity is equated with the soul, with God, so time is equated with infinity, with the individuated self.

Many of Borges' stories, which range from the earliest stories of the *Ficciones* of the late 1930s to the later ones of the late 1940s in *El Aleph*, are marked by the presence of a Divine, higher being, a union with whom is being envisaged or desired or even accomplished (temporarily so) by one of the characters. But the God, or god (often in the form of the Scriptures or Koran, at times also Allah) which emerges from these stories is a punishing, maddening, frustrating, annihilating force. This kind of divinity is that envisaged by the gnostic who views the Judeo-Christian God as a demiurge, a lesser god, responsible for evil and for suffering.

In his essays, such as 'Una vindicación del falso Basílides', 'La cábala', 'El Simurg y el águila', and also his poems, see e.g. 'El golem', Borges explores this very notion of the lesser god. In his stories, Borges delineates a God who castigates man for possessing knowledge of him or of his name ('El Aleph', 'La busca de Averroes'); a god who punishes Abenjacán for the transgression of appropriating the Divine attribute of the labyrinth, while Tzinacán ('La escritura del Dios'), who had deciphered the Divine writing in the jaguar's coat, is graced with a fleeting glimpse of

the Divine and consequently suffers the loss of both his personal and the Divine identity. The objectified presence in the coin of 'El Zahir', and the aleph of 'El Aleph' bring on insanity. The prospect of god contained in or identical to the library in 'La biblioteca de Babel' leads not to salvation but to frustration. The god which is likened to the lottery company in 'La lotería en Babilonia' is a random force; the God which Almotásim in 'El acercamiento de Almotásim' searches for is possibly himself in need and search of a god, and is thus a lesser god. 'El inmortal' poses the prospect of divinities who have died - a bizarre notion in itself - or absented themselves, and who, in their wake, left the chaos and the insanity of the *ciudad de los inmortales*, leading from cosmos to chaos, and thus inverting the notion of a benevolent, Divine order.

From a Christian perspective, without faith in God and the redeeming work of Christ, without at least a belief in God's existence, which for Borges' characters harbours the possibility, the need for personal healing - yet the fundamental unbelief in, and thus the unattainability of and ultimately, belief in oneself, perhaps in Borges himself - there can be no partaking in eternity, and hence no release from individuation or temporality, nor indeed from failures, transgressions, or guilt. From an Islamic perspective, one would embrace the unity of all being in God and the submission of one's whole life to him and his service. From a Hindu point of view, one would be required to accept the total oneness and inseparability of the self, *atman*, and the Divine, *brahman*. From a Buddhist point of view, one would have to renounce that very self, i.e. the erroneous notion of the *atman* in order to attain liberation and release (*moksa*) from the cycle of suffering and rebirth (*samsara*). What takes God's place in Buddhism is the supreme emptiness, nothingness, the no-self, also called *anatta*.

This may be why Borges is more drawn to yet also afraid of monotheistic religions and mysticism: because they hold the analogies better than Buddhism and the nothingness of the self. Hence his fear of the no-self, the absence of self: because the metaphor would break down, and it would make the exploration of the metaphor, and by extension that of the wounded self, impossible. In fact, the acceptance of a no-self would deny the wounded self its existence.

One of Borges' most striking paradigms, worked in every variant in slightly different ways, is the theme of the different notions of God: the Divine appears as the leveller ('Los teólogos'), the obliterator ('La escritura del Dios'), the absent one ('El inmortal'), the punishing one ('Abenjacán, muerto en su laberinto'), the maddening ('El Zahir'), the elusive ('La biblioteca de Babel'), the random ('La lotería en Babilonia').

Although his characters (more often than not in the first person) *do* in part aspire to a union with a higher Being, with a God of sorts, they also always fail. They do not reach transcendence. Where God *is* explicitly present, he is, always fatally so, contained, and thus identical with, a material object, such as a coin ('El Zahir'), a magical 'God's eye' ('El Aleph'), a labyrinth, etc. This speaks of the immanence of a Divine essence, but yet again, the seeker does not reach a state of union, or if he does, this union is imperfect, or annihilating. So Borges, like his characters, attempts to save himself through writing, through exploring spiritual doctrines. But this is destined for doom, because he does not proceed from God as the premise, but rather hopes to arrive at an experience of the Divine (as evident in his longing for an experience of eternity, of a unity of the self with a higher self), hopes to reach salvation by writing, by substituting God with writing, by exploring doctrines, by a text.

The consequences to the self of a quest for God without faith are that the self remains forever self and never becomes one, united with the other; it is not soul and thus does not partake in eternity. By analogical extension: the personal, wounded self of Borges will not heal for as long as Borges does not acknowledge and confront the origins of his lostness or acknowledge the fact that he *is* wounded at all.

Why is there a quest for God in the stories, for redemption? And why is there the desire for God's knowledge, for a God's eye view? It is so because there seems to be evidence of a design, a structure, also of purpose; a pattern, an order, such as the library promises, which suggests the presence or at least the possibility of God. The character embarks on the quest, fails to find or access the design or gets lost in the structure. Borges' enduring theme of the labyrinth can be seen as an expression of that

very failure to find God. In the face of such a failed quest, Borges explores the consequences of that failure to the notion of self.

The quest which Borges has his characters undergo is unlike the quest undertaken by a seeker either already believing or wanting to reach belief, or desiring to attain faith. Borges' characters seek the attributes, such as ultimate knowledge, ultimate vision, a transcendental state of timelessness, the release of the self from individuation. These attributes, however, are Divine in nature and thus only conferable by the Divine. In reaching for the attributes only, the seeker excludes the very Divine, and thus the quest is doomed. Whereas in the case of a believer there is faith in, or personal knowledge of, God's existence, whereby God 'provides' proof, by contrast Borges' approach is from the 'opposite end': he perceives evidence of design, assumes that there is a designer, i.e. a creator, investigates the design and hopes to arrive at actual proof of God/God's existence and then perhaps is ready to accept faith.

This omission, this oversight and exclusion of God lies at the heart of his characters' failure in both *Ficciones* and *El Aleph*. Borges projects onto them the absences of his own essayistic speculations. In this impossibility or absence of God, the fragmentation of personal identity ensues. Stories which display authorial or narratorial and textual identity are secondary as they are manifestations of the (greater) loss of or lack of personal identity.

In the early 1940s, Borges explores the theme of the versions in stories such as 'La biblioteca de Babel', 'La lotería en Babilonia', 'El acercamiento a Almotásim', and 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. These stories serve as the vehicle for the impossibility of God. They threaten the identity of the text, and, by extension, that of the author.

The mystical quest

'El acercamiento a Almotásim' of 1936 had first featured as an essay in *Historia de la eternidad*, then as a story in *Ficciones*, *El jardín de senderos que se*

bifurcan. The first person narrator of the *ficción* is anonymous and recounts someone else's tale. Within that tale, a third person narrator takes over the narration. The first person narrator is the writer and editor and reconstructs the story from two versions of a manuscript of 1932 and 1934 respectively. The suggestion that God might possibly be identical to the searching student, and that he may in fact be in search of another God and so on ad infinitum, forever unconcluded invalidates the notion of a singular, omnipotent and omnipresent God altogether. Thus knowledge or even experience of God remain a teaser, knowledge or experience forever incomplete and inconclusive, inferior. The gnostic vision of the potentially unending quest is a metaphor for Borges' own, never-ending, inconclusive quest for union, healing and fulfilment. It could be argued that Borges, far from suggesting such a reading, disparages it and rejects it in favour of his own conjecture.

The question of identity is markedly present in 'La escritura del Dios', which poses the difference between identification and individuation. Western philosophers and Eastern spiritual sources have sought to fathom our place as individuals within a larger cosmos all agree on the illusion of the separateness, if not the very existence, of the self, or ego. But what is the self? It is our internal awareness of ourselves; our centre of consciousness embodying what we think of as 'personality' and 'conscience'; it is capable of rationality: it is the seat of our identity. The term 'identity' thus denotes two different, almost opposite meanings: individuality on the one hand, and sameness on the other. Individuality indicates the notion of a *separated*, individuated self. Sameness indicates the identification, or unity of the self and the world. Borges is concerned with, longs for, yet never accomplishes the placing of the individual's place within a larger cosmos.

Identifying with the other does not necessarily bring loss of personal identity but rather enriches it. Paoli (1975, 144) sees in these stories the manifestations of a rare assertion of self-will over predetermination (1975, 191), a view which recapitulates Erika Lorenz's conviction that it is in these instances that the veil of *mâyâ* is torn and the liberation of the self achieved. But these experiences are few in Borges' tales. Where union with God is aspired to, such as in 'La escritura del Dios',

man, in his only temporary union with the Godhead, recognizes and simultaneously loses his own personal identity as well as the Divine one.

Just as 'El acercamiento a Almotásim' belittles or invalidates the notion of God, both 'La biblioteca de Babel' and 'La lotería en Babilonia'¹ (both of 1941), though in tantalising fashion giving the impression of a Divine design, they imply at the same time the impossibility of a Divine existence altogether. The library houses an endlessly spiralling array of books containing countless versions (and versions of the versions) of each and everyone's life, actual and potential. The possibility of finding the Book of Books, which is what each seeker attempts to do, as this book would contain all other books and would as such be the answer to all there ever was to know, to search for, the embodiment of all knowledge, and most of all: of one's life story, one's identity, or of coming upon the *Hombre del Libro*, equal to God, and who is said to possess knowledge of the Book of Books, lures the searcher into a cruelly unfulfillable quest, forever on the seeming brink of an elusive revelation. As the Book of Books would contain all possible, and all potential books, and all versions of all of these, which are thus an infinite number of books, it could only be with infinite time at hand and progressing ever more into linear perpetuity that this Book of Books, or the *Hombre del Libro* could be found. Consequently, not only does the sheer infinite quantity of books make the discovery of the Book of Books impossible, but the very existence of such a Book is, in fact, an impossibility, is only a mere theoretical possibility as it, being the Book which contains all books, would thus also contain itself, and this is a paradox, which, as such, is impossible.

A paradox is 'a statement which appears acceptable but which has unacceptable or contradictory consequences' (Bullock & Trombley 1999). There are three kinds of paradoxes, all of which explored by Borges in the course of his essay writing: the first kind are paradoxes of the infinite, such as posed by Zeno of Elea (see Borges in 1929: 'La perpetua carrera de Aquiles y la tortuga', and in 1939: 'Avatares de la tortuga'). The second kind are semantic paradoxes, such as the famous saying by Epimenides the Cretan who says that all Cretans are always liars. And thirdly, there are those paradoxes that are of set theory, such as posed by Russell, and by Borges in 'La

¹ Where the first person narrators are the central characters of their own tale and teller of the *ficción*.

biblioteca de Babel' when he poses the impossible, the forever elusive Book of Books.

So although the sense of God, of a pattern, and of order are alluded to, due to a detectable pattern, and a seeming purpose in the world's design, the problem, or rather the impossibility for Borges' characters remains of finding, accessing or following that pattern. The source of the pattern remains teasingly imminent yet forever inaccessible; the logic of the pattern, the order, and the structure remain forever elusive. Salvation, and God, are therefore unresolved paradoxes at best, and mere theoretical possibilities at worst.

Omnipresence is at work in 'La lotería en Babilonia'. The narrator is a Babylonian and as such is subject to the same, ever-changing, erratic kaleidoscope of personal fates and identities, which each draw of the lottery imposes on, or graces both players and non-players alike. The Compañía, like an omnipotent and wilful God, confers fate and destiny onto the individual. The story serves also as the vehicle for the 'heretic's' (Borges?) speculation that the Compañía, i.e. God, is not real or, if real, is subject to another higher, random force. It is the visions of a temporal abyss and that of an impossible or impotent God which Borges allows to emanate towards the end of the stories. Through this absence of any underlying higher order, fragmentation ensues, interminably and inexorably so:

Otra [conjetura], por boca de heresiarcas enmascarados, *que no ha existido nunca y que no existirá* [la Compañía]. Otra, no menos vil, razona que es indiferente afirmar o negar la realidad de la tenebrosa corporación, porque Babilonia no es otra cosa que un infinito juego de azares.

(‘La lotería en Babilonia’, p.79)

In his essay of 1929, 'La duración del infierno', Borges had equated the dream of his own infinity with the abhorred *regressus* or *progressus ad infinitum*. He fictionalises this theme twenty years later in 'La escritura del Dios': Tzinacán dreams of sand grains piling up on and suffocating him, and of 'awakening' into another dream and so on until he dies. It is only when he calls out that one cannot die of grains of sand, and that there are no dreams into dreams that he awakens and welcomes his destiny of prisoner. Tzinacán has experienced a union with his destiny which had conferred on him the status of prisoner, no longer that of priest.

Quest and knowledge

'La escritura del Dios'² of 1949 is a story which only seemingly speaks of the 'mystic's path' towards union; it is fraught with frustration and the denial of ultimate union with the Divine, as the union with God, the taste of God's knowledge, is temporary, and ultimately self-annihilating. It is the story of Tzinacán, high temple priest, told in first person narration, who, imprisoned and having resisted being tormented into renouncing his supreme god, invokes the existence of a secret, divine inscription conferring almighty powers. He recalls the existence of this eternal inscription, legible only by the chosen one. But: which object could contain such writing, and in which language would it reveal itself? And is not all creation subject to change or cessation? An inspiration reveals to him that the jaguar which paces outside his cell might carry on its coat, encoded in the shape of its spots, that very writing. After long years of studying the jaguar's coat from within his cell, Tzinacán experiences union with the divinity, during which the why and how of the universe and of all existence are revealed to him, and also the message: fourteen words, which, upon utterance, would make Tzinacán divine and almighty himself.

Yet utterance is impossible, is meaningless, because Tzinacán has lost all conception of himself as an individual, as Tzinacán. He will not, he cannot utter the words, and resigns himself to perish in his cell forever. Although Tzinacán does decipher the Divine writing on the jaguar's coat and does indeed experience a union with his God, this union is not life-transforming, not salvific, as he is subsequently being stripped of and no longer cares for his individuality. The consequence of seeing the world from God's perspective, of eating from the tree of knowledge, is a total and abject indifference to both personal self and destiny; it results in a loss of identity; the degrading existence continues in Tzinacán's cell, with no purpose and no salvation:

Quien ha entrevisto el universo [...] no puede pensar en un hombre, en sus triviales dichas o desventuras, aunque ese hombre sea él. Ese hombre *ha sido él* y ahora no le importa. Qué le importa la suerte de aquel otro, qué le importa la nación de aquel otro, si él, ahora es nadie. Por eso no pronuncio la fórmula, por eso dejo que me olviden los días, acostado en la oscuridad.

² The first person narrator is the central character of the/his own tale and teller of the *ficción*.

Alazraki too (1988, 49) points out the secular nature of Tzinacán's vision. And he claims (1988, 144):

Thus, the treatment of themes in the essays does not differ, basically, from that employed in the narratives. There are some instances in which the short story is merely a variation or an elaboration of material contained in the essay.

'La escritura del Dios' offers a narrative expression of these spiritual-philosophical speculations. Schopenhauer, an admirer and follower of the Hindu scriptures known as *Upanishads*, was first to introduce Eastern cosmology into Western philosophical thought. Schopenhauer's³ view is that the material world (i.e. the world as we seem to know it) is nothing but a system of illusions governed by, amongst others, the illusory principle of individuation. Individuation is the false notion of a separate, individual identity (individuality). Only by transcending the system of illusions can man experience the unity with the world as a whole. This unity of the self with the world is identification (sameness). The cosmology of the *Upanishads* holds that the multiplicity of the universe is a game played by a supreme consciousness (Brahman), forming and sustaining the universe. Originally a holistic unity, Brahman chose to break itself apart into individual beings - to decompose itself into separate things and beings: i.e. into the world as we know it. The Divine One became the Many, and thus all individual beings and things share in the divinity of the One. Only Brahman, and the self-as-Brahman (i.e. the self which realizes its unity with or sameness as the whole, the One, the underlying unity and ultimate reality) are the true self. It is distinct from, and greater than the self-as-ego (the Many, which is the illusion of the separateness of the self). The true self is self-as-Brahman, self which realizes its unity with the whole.

The story is the character's very own experience of his identity, his place as an individual within the cosmos. Tzinacán loses his self and the unity with the Divine: he experiences neither individuation (as a separate self) nor identification (with the unity).⁴ Tzinacán fails to reach a sustainable union with the divinity (the whole), and

³ Schopenhauer's individual self is held illusory. It contrasts with the will which is a life-driving compulsion which transcends both individuation and the will to attain identification (unity) of the self with the world. See also Freud's distinction between the ego and the *id*.

⁴ In Guimarães Rosa's story 'O Espelho' (Guimarães Rosa 1964), the man in the mirror initially loses his reflection, yet not the self (as lost by Tzinacán). Through the final reflection (the light and the pre-

neither does he retain his sense of individuality - he suffers the worst of both worlds. The union with the whole was temporary and resulted in the loss of his individual identity. And the very loss of self prevents him now from reaching the final unity with the cosmos which he had fleetingly glimpsed. Union, for Tzinacán, is not salvation but a worse state of isolation than ever before. Worse because he has glimpsed union and is now aware of his failure to sustain it. Worse also because he has lost his self-worth⁵. For Tzinacán to reach lasting union (or identification) with his divinity, he must assert his self and utter the formula. Yet the experience of the initial union had resulted in the loss of the notion of self. Salvation is only seeming, is cruel and mocking⁶. Tzinacán's experience is one of exclusion: neither does he maintain his individuality (identity), nor does he attain unity (identification) with the whole.

Pero yo sé que nunca diré esas palabras, porque ya no me acuerdo de Tzinacán. [...] Quien ha entrevisto el universo [...] no puede pensar en un hombre [...] Ese hombre [Tzinacán] [...] ahora es nadie.

(p.123)

There is a relationship which Borges delineates between experience and language (the utterance of the sacred formula), which Tzinacán, however, cannot transcend. His initial experience of the union with the divinity is not enough to reach salvation: he has to speak the formula, the fourteen words. Speech requires consciousness and self-awareness, and this is exactly what the union has robbed him of. This speaks of Borges' desire for, yet also of his simultaneous fear of the fixity of the word spoken.

Zen Buddhism holds that 'words are the frames of maya [illusion], the meshes of its net, and the experience is of the water which slips through' (Watts 1957, 64)⁷. For

natal face) he gains a greater image of his true self which transcends his 'actual', material self and which also reveals his eternal soul.

⁵ Guimarães Rosa's 'man in the mirror' in 'O Espelho' has reached a union with something greater than himself, and yet this something is truly himself. The revelation of the soul as part of a larger cosmos is an expression of identification (of the self with the whole). And yet, he has not lost his sense of individuality.

⁶ Compare this with Rosa's protagonist who shifts from extreme singularity (the desire to eclipse from his reflection all 'inessential' features) to union with his true self within a cosmic whole. Initially however, the quest, in its narcissic form, had led to the loss of his reflection. This loss of reflection is a sign of extreme selfhood, a kind of threat posed by the (extremely individuated) self to nullify itself. The separate, totally individuated self can thus be seen to be illusory, even destructive.

'O homem no espelho' experiences inclusion and harmonization: he reaches both a higher sense of individuality and the inclusion within a wider cosmos.

⁷ See Watts (1957, 65):

Tzinacán to utter the fourteen words in order to reach perfect identification (or merger) with the divinity seems paradoxical and therefore is doomed from the outset. Inbuilt in the (seeming) salvation is its failure. The divinity is mocking its priest, its servant, teasing him with the promise of almighty unity but depriving him of the very means to attain this unity: his individuality. The temporary union with the divinity robbed Tzinacán of his identity, his self-worth, he is thereafter both unable and disinterested in uttering the Divine formula. His identity has ceased to exist or matter, and no unity can ever be achieved. What is left of him is a kind of self devoid of self-worth yet aware of its own oblivion. For Tzinacán, the union of the self with the cosmic whole is precluded by the oblivion of the self⁸. Markedly present is also the destructive, vengeful element of Tzinacán's formula⁹:

Me bastaría decirla [...] para ser joven, para ser inmortal, para que el tigre destrozara a Alvarado [Tzinacán's arch enemy], para sumir el santo cuchillo en pechos españoles [...].

(p.123)

What Tzinacán thus suffers is the cessation of his self and the preclusion from the whole¹⁰.

In 'El Aleph', the Borges-character, again in first person narration, is in search of a Divine perspective, to enter, via the magical *aleph*, a vision of the universe which, in its comprehensiveness and simultaneity, is a God's eye view of the creation. The detested Carlos Daneri, upon repeatedly using the *aleph*, had acquired such a total vision of the world on which he based his odiously bad poem, much to the aesthetic chagrin of the Borges-character. Ironically, it is that very hideous poem which gains Daneri the literary prize to which Borges had aspired to himself. The God's-eye vision does not bring excellence, nor beauty; it is seen as arbitrary, random, and granting favour to the undeserved. It is a vision, an usurpation of that which no man has seen, nor should be seeing¹¹:

What cannot be conveyed by speech can nevertheless be passed on by some non-verbal means of communication.

⁸ Guimarães Rosa's story puts forward a cosmic whole which includes the individual self in the soul.

⁹ Rosa's '*homem no espelho*' reaches a deeper, enriched, complete awareness of himself. His individuality is affirmed within the larger cosmos. There is a unification of both individuation and identification through the wordless experiences of suffering and loving.

¹⁰ The man in the mirror, however, enjoys the affirmation of his self and the inclusion into the whole.

¹¹ For a discussion of 'El Aleph' see Alazraki 1988, 48-49.

Y sentí vértigo y lloré, porque mis ojos habían visto ese objeto secreto y conjetural, cuyo nombre usurpan los hombres, pero que ningún hombre ha mirado: el inconcebible universo. Sentí una infinita veneración, infinita lástima.

(p.171)

The quest this time is prompted by the death of Beatriz, adored from afar by the Borges-character in the story, and by his desire to share in what had been her world. This world, as will become apparent to Borges on beholding the *aleph*, had held the love relationship with the hated Daneri. The vision, a union of sorts, is not desired for the sake of the Divine. It is an usurpation, the consequence of which are indifference, frustration and speculation as to the truthfulness of the *aleph*, who, Borges speculates, might well be an imitation, an inferior replica which covers the real. This, again, is a gnostic vision of a hierarchy of divinities, each one reflecting, in ever-increasing degrees of inferiority, the Divine reality. A reality, however, which is not accessible in its perfection, where the seeker has to content himself with inferior versions, tantalising yet ultimately inferior glimpses of that which the Divine could be, and of what it might confer.

In 'El Zahir', the consequence of uniting with the objectified presence of God in the physical encounter with the magical coin, is insanity. This immanence of the Divine in an object speaks of a notion of divinity which is closer to magic than to the spiritual. The God in 'Abenjacán, muerto en su laberinto' deals punishment for the transgression of appropriating Divine attributes, whereas 'La busca de Averroes' explores the tension between the desire for and existence of absolute knowledge (the absolute or sacred text) on the one hand, and relative, contingent knowledge on the other. It also poses a tension between absolute, sacred, transcendent and mystical experience on the one hand, and relative, contingent, immanent knowledge on the other. Alazraki comments thus (1988, 45):

The coin is no longer a fortuitous object and becomes a form of mystical illumination.

In both 'El Aleph', 'El Zahir', and 'La escritura del Dios', the God-images can be equated with love, a woman's love, magic, the writing, privileged knowledge, etc. These are seen by Borges as the miracle cure, an outside, externalised cure, as are the magic, the object, the decoded writing. In objectifying and externalising the healing cure, Borges confers the power to an arbitrary, external force to whose authority he

submits himself. He thus relinquishes personal power, and, more significantly so, Divine power, and ultimately he thus relinquishes healing.

Despite the irony and humour deployed in delineating what at first glance appear absurdly vain and self-obsessed characters of both Teodelina and her admirer in 'El Zahir', Borges, in deceptively and typically casual manner, introduces profoundly philosophical and theological themes when he asserts that Teodelina searches for the absolute in the ephemeral. Teodelina, although outwardly seeking to establish ever-increasing facets of herself, as if in an attempt to assert her seeming instability of (external) self, appears to be driven by an obsession for perfection, and as such displays a yearning for something more than her obvious superficiality. For Teodelina to seek perfection is to seek an essence, an absolute.

The mystical undercurrents in Borges' writing are linked to the story's female (co-)protagonist and to the theme of selfhood, a notion which is in flux in both Borges' male and female characters. The externalisation of perfection in Teodelina is in relation to the externalisation and objectification of the Divine. Madness as a consequence can be seen as a creative, spiritual crisis with the potential for true knowledge of a spiritual reality.

In Borges' stories, the union is not with the Supreme God, but with the *demiurge*, which he had explored in the essays of the early 1930s. Hence the god vision is destructive. The gods of 'El Zahir' and of 'El Aleph' are linked to material things and thus are evil in the gnostic view. 'La escritura del Dios' speaks of gods, demiurges it might be said, from which stem evil and suffering, not the supreme God of salvation. Tzinacán's mistake, as it were, is to be expecting of the demiurge that which only the Supreme God, the unattainable Supreme Being, can give: ultimate knowledge and salvation.

In his stories, Borges appears to have his characters reach for the highest of spiritual goals: the union or encounter with God. How does one connect or unite with God, a higher self or reach emptiness? Through prayer, meditation, revelation, (direct) experience or intuition of God (mystical) through faith: spiritual disposition to accept the reality of God, total submission and service to God. The intermediary stages in the

spiritual quest are all of the above, i.e. faith, prayer, meditation, revelation, submission, etc. Yet Borges' characters attempt to reach that union without going through any intermediary stage, or spiritual evolution, no maturing, no prayer nor meditation, etc. In the Christian sense, a belief in the redemptive work of Christ, or by means of any other redeeming process as other religions present them (eg. redemption in both Buddhism (bodhisattvas) and Christianity; atonement). Redemption is defined as (Bowker 1997,107):

The process whereby the human race is restored to that communion with God, for which it was created, through the salvific work of Christ. [...] More loosely still, redemption is then applied to salvific processes and achievements in other religions [e.g. in Buddhism].

Atonement is defined as (Bowker 1997,107):

The reconciliation of men and women to God through the death of Christ.

In all major religions, the state of enlightenment is achieved through progress in key practices (mental and spiritual) which lead to perfection. Thus, union or enlightenment are not achieved by a mere 'getting the knack' or the discovery of a 'secret' alone; rather, it is in the course of an individual's life, in any case a significant portion of it, which is required, unless the individual (such as prophets, mystics, etc) is struck by Divine inspiration, in which case s/he may experience a life- and mind-altering revelation instantaneously.

The 'seeker' in Borges' stories glimpses an object, has an inkling of a design and therefore assumes that there must be a 'designer'. But God cannot be apprehended like an object can be; nor is he 'in' any object. The following definition of the concept of God in Bowker (1997, 378):

God (supposing God is) is not an object among objects in a universe, able to be discovered and/or explored, as are atoms, [...]. Nor is God the conclusion of an argument, although argument points to the probability of God at least in the sense that the universe makes more sense if it exists as a consequence of one who produces and sustains it, than otherwise.

Borges desires to decipher the code, as it were, and he is prepared to give it his intellectual and mental energies; but 'getting it' is through the heart, and the soul, which are the very ones which Borges is at pains to shield, to not engage. This can be seen as one of the reasons why Borges is so interested in other religions. His

explorations serve to find out if there is a way of reaching this without the journey, without going the laborious path. In Buddhism, there is no notion of real self, but in Borges, the wounded self is still there.

But the aspired union with God reveals itself as a means to an end only, not as the end in itself, nor as the culmination of a spiritual journey or life. The communion with God is aspired to within this worldly life; analogically speaking: outer-worldly salvation is not what Borges desires, his desire is to be united, to be healed here and now. Through the union with the Divine, the enlightened individual would see, understand and feel everything there is to see, feel and understand, and his whole existence and that of the universe would suddenly make sense; the (erroneous) way to reach this stage is by exploring the pattern, by deciphering the code, by finding the secret, etc; all of these, the pattern, the object, the writing, the secret, are external, are objectified. God, or union with God, is not seen as an end in itself, nor is it seen as a reward for the individual's spiritual striving, nor, on the most profound level, as a grace conferred by the very Divine, regardless of merit. There is no notion or desire that the individual has to undergo a personal voyage of self-knowledge, understanding, transformation, humility and compassion, etc; i.e. there is no notion of any of the redeeming and enlightening processes and graces which are common to all religions in their quest for enlightenment or salvation.

Sufism, which Borges evokes in 'El acercamiento a Almotásim' with the tale of the birds, warns that the pursuit of union and enlightenment must not occur for the sake of the ecstatic union alone, but must arise from one's dedication and submission to God and for him alone; because 'while the experience of the unity of all being in God is real, it is neither the whole nor the end of religion: moral and virtuous life are as important' (Bowker 1997, 334). These stories utter a warning as it were, albeit implicit and perhaps unacknowledged, against the Western, modern or materialistic interpretation of mystic pursuits as a means to self-improvement.

The union with the Divine in Borges' stories is desired not so much out of faith in (a) God, nor is it achieved by perfecting key mental and spiritual practices, but out of a (mercenary) conviction that through it the individual would gain something

(Tzinacán would go from the depths of pain and despair to unspeakable bliss - but then: although he deciphers the sacred writing, he does not experience bliss). The seeker's end is not perfection nor devotion, but gain.

On an analogical level, the stages for the wounded self to recovery are: recognition, confrontation, exploration, recovery, healing. Borges' characters fail, not because of the quest, for there is no true quest as such, no real journey, nor do they fail because of the goal; they fail because they miss out the journey as such, the stages they try to skip; those stages signify the very process of recovery. Borges' characters ultimately fail. This is so because their quest is self-serving and thus doomed to failure; salvation and bliss are sought to be achieved by some kind of magic, an instant cure to Tzinacán's suffering; in short: the end is gain (release from prison and torment, also the prospect of revenge). The aspired union with God in Borges' stories reveals itself as a means to an end only (an end, however, which does not spell happiness, fulfilment or union), not as the end in itself, nor as the culmination of a spiritual journey/life; nor as an expression of dedication or submission to a Divine will. God is not the end in itself, but a means to an end. That end is, at best, self-improvement, and at worst it is gain, with completeness, omniscience, etc. as the gains. On the metaphorical level, the gain can be seen as the sense of wholeness (the aspired union with the Divine) for the wounded self (personified by the seeker).

God, and God's vision or knowledge¹² is seen as a miracle cure by Borges' characters, a goal by means of which one 'wins', as it were, omniscience, etc. They correspond to his desire for wholeness. The means lie not within the individual, his/her own path, but the means are tools and paths outside of the seeker's own self; he does not look inward but outwards to the realm of the material for clues, pointers, etc. Thus, union can never be of the self, of the innermost being of the individual, with God. Union, if at all it occurs in Borges' stories, is therefore always on the surface, is with the material; thus Borges abdicates power and responsibility, both on the personal and the spiritual levels. The consequences for the self of a quest for God in the absence of faith are that the self remains forever self, tied to the temporary, the

¹² On the theme of knowledge in Borges' stories see Hurley's 'Afterword' in Hurley 1998, 189.

individual, the contingent. It will not be one with the other, not on the individual nor on the spiritual level where there is thus no soul and no eternal.

This may be why Borges is more drawn to, yet also can be seen to shy away from monotheistic religions and mysticism: because they hold the analogies better than Buddhism and the nothingness of the self. Hence Borges' hesitation at the notion of the no-self (Buddhist), the absence of self: because the metaphor would break down, and it would make the exploration of the metaphor (and by extension: of the wounded self) impossible. In fact, by embracing the notion of a no-self, the wounded self would be denied, and with it the self that may become whole.

Salvation and identity

'Tres versiones de Judas' of 1944 can be seen as a bridging story. It is also strangely subversive. With its theme of traitor - saviour, it plays with the consequences of there not being a God, consequently no ultimate judge, and no absolutes like good and evil, no absolute and no truths. Paradoxically, in the absence of God, God is directly affected in that he is identified with his own traitor. There is no overt moral distinction drawn between the saviour and the traitor, they are identical in that they are equally valid in the indistinctness of Jesus the saviour from his moral counterpart, the traitor. This theme of the adoption of a false identity, the theme of redemption also, is explored in stories such as 'La forma de la espada', 'Tema del traidor y del héroe'.

The story unfolds as follows: in his first work, the 1904 *Kristus och Judas*, Nils Runeberg, a deeply religious man, elaborates De Quincey's heresy which declares that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariote was part of the divine plan (since there can be nothing erroneous or *casual* about the Scriptures (being a sacred Book) and thus Divine in itself:

El orden inferior es un espejo del orden superior [...] Judas refleja de algún modo a Jesús. (p.177)

The story proposes that Judas, being part of the Divine plan, is at the very least Divine himself, and possibly even identical to Jesus. Judas consciously foregoes happiness and righteousness, as well as any virtues that may be associated with a crime other than the betrayal of trust in order to fulfil the Divine plan (p.178-179). In *Den hemlige Frälsaren* of 1909, Runeberg argues that God lowered himself to the lowest human form in order to redeem the world: God became Judas and reasons that since his 'discovery' went by unnoticed, this too is part of the Divine plan (p.181-182) and so concludes that Judas is (identical with) the saviour. The narrator concludes that Runeberg's contribution to the catalogue of heresies is to add evil and mishap to the notion of the Son.

There is a disquieting, yet strangely seductive logic here, a seductive madness even, which is reminiscent of the distorted reasoning of Otto zur Linde in 'Deutsches Requiem'. Good and evil are relative. This relativity accounts for not only the blurring of the very definitions of good and evil, but for the interchangeability of the two. What the story delineates is not so much the grey which inhabits the spectrum between black and white, but the total redundancy of such concepts as black and white, good and evil. But there is an obvious fallacy in this reasoning: the fallacy is that the notion of 'good' is not treated as an absolute good; if it were, then no evil act could justify the outcome, however beneficiary that outcome might be; anything positive, which results from an evil act, would result despite the evil, never because of it. The good that comes of evil is good because it transforms evil by the power of love, which is the essence of the Christian mystery of love and salvation. What Borges explores in this text is more than an intellectual game drawing on theology and heresy; it is more also than a game of logic; what he poses and implicitly explores, and what Borges invites the reader to explore, are serious notions of moral and spiritual significance.

Borges' empathises with, perhaps identifies with the Son, *el Verbo*, and when he speaks of the Trinity, it is with the emphasis on the Son, as in his early essay 'Una vindicación de la Cábala':

Imaginada de golpe, su concepción de un padre, un hijo y un espectro, articulados en un solo organismo, parece un caso de teratología intelectual, una deformación que sólo el horror de una pesadilla pudo parir. [...]

Las tres inextricables personas importan un horror intelectual, una infinitud ahogada, especiosa, como de contrarios espejos.

At the same time, and in marked tension to the above in the very same statement, Borges seems to object to the (lowly) place of Christ once the concept of the Trinity were to be renounced:

Entendemos que *renunciar a la Trinidad* - a la Dualidad, por lo menos - *es hacer de Jesús un delegado ocasional del Señor, un incidente de la historia, no el auditor imperecedero, continuo, de nuestra devoción.* [...]

(‘Una vindicación de la Cábala’, p.56-57)

In the absence of an underlying, definitive authority, in the absence of any absolutes, one’s own life, or death, may be creatively reconstructed in inconclusive versions of texts and narrations. ‘La otra muerte’ (1949), ‘La forma de la espada’ (1942), and ‘Tema del traidor y del héroe’ (1944) show, and, albeit to a slightly lesser degree, ‘Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto’¹³ (1951), and ‘El Sur’ (1953) all attest to this.

Fragmentation of the Self

In the absence of a transcendence from temporality into eternity, there is no concept of soul, no essence, and so the focus is on the self, individuated in time, potentially in infinite time. In the absence of a true essence to the self, in the absence also of an Absolute or a Divine, identities are subject to the change and flux brought on by time, infinite time. In the absence of an ultimate, Divine reality, there can be no forgiveness, and ultimately no redemption, which is what Borges’ characters in stories such as ‘La otra muerte’, ‘La forma de la espada’, and ‘Tema del traidor y del héroe’ desire yet never reach. Borges explores different ways of blurring personal identity, when, in another of his paradigms that characterise the stories, his characters change or hide a shameful past or history. The desire to make it true and lasting is an expression of the desire to be redeemed and thus absolved of guilt or shame. His themes are guilt, heresy, treason, betrayal, deception, which all, ultimately, call for

¹³ In an ending reminiscent of the total annihilation of self in death in ‘El fin’, Unwin concludes the story of Abenjacán and Zaid:

[Zaid] simuló ser Abenjacán, mató a Abenjacán, y finalmente *fue Abenjacán*. - Sí - confirmó Dunraven - Fue un vagabundo que, antes de ser nadie en la muerte, recordaría haber sido un rey o haber fingido ser un rey, algún día.

(‘Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto’ p.137)

forgiveness, and for redemption. Redemption in these stories, as becomes evident, is not through the Divine or through salvation, but through narration. The God images which do emerge from the stories are fraught with ambivalence. God is a character, a magician, the leveller, an indifferent judge. Where God features as such a character, he is present as a miracle worker affecting the workings of time, the brain, and altering perception. The stories are characterised by the individual's attempts at safeguarding a desired identity.

In the absence of a God figure there cannot be eternity, as eternity is an attribute of the Divine; eternity also means the release from temporality and individuation, i.e. the release from ever-recurring cycles and from solitude, also the release from ever-changing, unstable identities. In the absence of God, there can thus be no partaking in eternity, and no soul, or: a soul that is lost, quite literally so, in the void left by the absent God figure. In the absence of a God figure, there can be no redemption.

The existence of God or an Absolute would mean for the individual the union with the Divine. It would confer cohesion and meaning and the release from solitude to personal identity, and salvation for the individual self. Through it, the cycle of eternally recurring selves and lives would be broken. In the absence of God, there is no guarantee and no guarantor of a soul, i.e. of an unchanging essence to our fleeting being; identity is unstable, subject to change and alteration, to deceit; identity can be swapped or even be absent. This is so because of infinity, i.e. time unbroken, unreleased; time, infinity is the opposite, the counterplayer to eternity (Divine), the anti-player also to the soul, the essence.

Bound in time, and with infinite time, and no transcendence into the eternal, the fragmentation of the self and the arbitrariness of personal identity occur, and changing identities ensue. In 'Pierre Menard', 'El Inmortal', and 'El fin', the consequences of the failed quest for union are explored through the relations in the text between author, text, and reader.

Failure and the past

In 'La forma de la espada' (1942), 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' (1944), and 'La otra muerte' (1949) the secondary narratives involve protagonists who wilfully alter their identities by swapping roles with their opposites in order to alter their shameful past. These stories have as a theme the desire to alter the past and are in truth stories about redemption. In 'La otra muerte', 'La forma de la espada', and 'La otra muerte', this desire for redemption is brought on by guilt (sin), or by failure. Redemption can be defined in the following manner (Bowker 1997, 805):

In Christian theology the term is inherited from the New Testament, where it is associated with the death of Christ [...]. [...] More generally and loosely, the term is now used of the process whereby the human race is restored to that communion with God, for which it was created, through the salvific work of Christ. [...] More loosely still, redemption is then applied to salvific processes and achievements in other religions [e.g. bodhisattva in Buddhism].

In their desire for forgiveness and redemption, Borges' characters desire to annul or change their past, desire to annul their guilt; in the absence of a redeeming essence, the emphasis is on annulment, rather than on redemption, and the result are ever-changing, unstable identities, both personal and textual. The protagonists in 'La forma de la espada' and 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' attempt at hiding their shameful pasts when they adopt their counterparts' identity. Original identity is being deliberately obliterated, and a chosen identity willingly adopted.

In 'La otra muerte' of 1949, whose original title was 'La redención', the first person narrator of the *ficción* possesses knowledge of Damián's story and elaborates on the conflicting versions by Coronel Tabares and Doctor Amaro; the reference to Monegal (p.74) identify him, as in the other two stories, as a Borges-character of sorts. Damián redeems himself of his cowardice by dying 'another' death. The God vision here is a magician juggling skilfully with time (p.79, 80). The twist of the story is that Damián's version of his heroic death imposes itself on 'reality', and thus both versions are 'true'.

Just as in 'La otra muerte' a fictitious destiny imposes itself on the Coronel's memory and thus imposes itself on reality, in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940), the impact of a fictitious text on reality is foregrounded: each version of the text (the

encyclopaedias) corresponds to a different phase of the intrusion into this world by another, initially 'fantastic' or fictitious reality. In a Borgesian twist on authorship, there is, notably, no 'author' to the first text within the story, i.e. the very first article had been brought into existence by Casares' memory alone. Imaginary texts are thus capable of acting on reality, each version of reality corresponding to a particular encyclopaedia. The first-person narrator-character is again a 'Borges' of sorts and plays a crucial role in the discovery of Uqbar; he is a translator and, as such, creates versions of existing texts.

A slightly different working of the theme of the self-invention of personal identity can be found in 'El milagro secreto' (1943) Hladik identifies himself, his essence as as the author of *Los enemigos* which would redeem his previous literary failures, so by finishing his work, he would redeem himself through the literary process of writing, or rather of mentally composing. He is thus the author of his own death.

Failure and guilt

In 'La forma de la espada' (1942) the themes are confession, guilt, treason, deception, and redemption is aspired to, though not achieved through narration. *El inglés*, who is really Irish, the protagonist of the story, as well as of his own narration, is a scrupulously just, though severe man. Borges, the character-narrator of the story, stops over at the Irishman's farm and gets to hear the story of his scar, on condition that he re-tell the story without omitting a single villainy, a single trespass. The story is of how *el inglés* encountered John Vincent Moon, a singularly cowardly man in the course of the revolution he fought for. The theme of trespass in the guise of the original sin, and of the salvation through Christ are introduced early on the story, when the Irishman reflects:

Lo que hace un hombre es como si lo hicieran todos los hombres. Por eso no es injusto que una desobediencia en un jardín contamine al género humano; por eso no es injusto que la crucifixión de un sólo judío baste para salvarlo. Acaso Schopenhauer tiene razón: yo soy los otros, cualquier hombre es todos los hombres [...].

(*'La forma de la espada'*, p.138)

The first of the themes, the trespass, foreshadows the theme of personal guilt and failure on the part of the Irishman, who indeed is to reveal himself to be the very traitor he denounces to his visitor, Borges, from whom he expects not understanding, nor forgiveness, but condemnation and contempt. The second theme, salvation, is interesting in that there does not seem to be any form of redemption possible for the traitor, who makes his confession, cathartic as it might be, to one he expects, indeed needs to condemn him. The very purpose of inverting the identities of traitor and betrayed is so that he may be seen in all his villainy, which reveals a great need to be recognised for what he is, or sees himself to be, in his true identity. Underneath the wish to be seen for what, and who he is, there is however also the unspoken longing for forgiveness and redemption, for absolution from his trespass, and for salvation. Yet none of these he dares to hope for. The pardon, in any case, could not be conferred by the visitor, although the confession, painful to Moon himself and as such a sign of his suffering, is being made to that very visitor in whose power, however, neither pardon nor absolution lie:

Borges: a usted que es un desconocido, le he hecho esta confesión. No me duele tanto su menosprecio. [...] ¿Usted no me cree? - balbuceó - ¿No ve que llevo escrita en la cara la marca de mi infamia? Le he narrado la historia de este modo para que usted la oyera hasta el fin. Yo he denunciado al hombre que me amparó: yo soy Vincent Moon. Ahora desprécieme.

(‘La forma de la espada’, p.139)

The traitor wants, he needs to be heard, and for fear of his visitor abandoning the conversation, perhaps in disgust, and unwilling to lend his ear to a traitor, to a sinner such as Moon perceives himself to be, he adopts the identity of the betrayed in order to ensure unmitigated condemnation. His desire is to redeem himself, to be judged, not merely punished, as he is already punished and wears the mark like Cain’s symbol. In the absence of a divine judge, he calls on a human judge, who, however, cannot absolve. The (attempt at) redemption remains inadequate and incomplete. In Borges’ story, Moon’s deception and guilt have no ultimate judge other than the listener, Borges, and other than the reader; redemption is thus attempted through narration. What would divine judgement confer to Moon? It would bring a conclusion, and if there were a true redemptive force, it would bring absolution. Not the undoing of the past, nor of its mistakes and trespasses, but their forgiveness.

The absence of an absolute judge, also of a redeemer, of forgiveness and exoneration, accounts for the manifold versions of pasts, deaths, and identities. The implication is an endless multiplicity of versions, texts, personae, identities; consequently there are no absolutes.

Betrayal and redemption

In 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' (1944) the first and third person narrator of the *ficción* is anonymous and refers someone else's tale. The first person narrator is the writer who fashions the story of Ryan and his heroic grandfather Kilpatrick; references to Chesterton and Leibniz (p.141) identify him as a 'Borges' of sorts. As in 'La forma de la espada', the themes in 'Tema del traidor y del héroe' are confession, guilt, treason, deception and the attempt to achieve redemption through narration. This, however, is incomplete, forever covering and uncovering 'truths' and remains unresolved in the absence of an absolute judge.

In the story, Kilpatrick's companion Nolan, who had been entrusted by Kilpatrick himself with uncovering the identity of the traitor in their midst, does indeed uncover the traitor: it is Kilpatrick himself. In order to preserve the heroic image of Kilpatrick, the beloved Irish hero, and in order to further the revolutionary cause, Nolan, with the assent of Kilpatrick and inspired by famous plays, stages the traitor's assassination in a crowded theatre, thus turning him into a public hero in his death. But although Nolan fabricates the 'play' (the lie) of Kilpatrick's assassination, he also weaves in the means by which that very fabrication can be uncovered. These are his very own '*intersticios de sinrazón*', traces that lead to the truth, perhaps because both Nolan and Kilpatrick desire to be seen and recognised, desire the truth beyond all human deceit, no matter how noble the cause. They desire the absolute, and to be redeemed beyond the human, beyond the narratorial. And yet, even this is to be denied them, as Ryan, who had indeed uncovered the 'lie' covering his grandfather's treason, suppresses the truth and perpetuates the lie of his grandfather Kilpatrick's heroic assassination.

The Borges-narrator speaks of his own process of creation and invention when he says (p.141):

He imaginado este argumento, que escribiré tal vez y que ya de algún modo me justifica, en las tardes inútiles.

The meaning of *justificar* in the context of this story is threefold: firstly, aesthetically: as a writer, the narrator is hoping to redeem himself through the excellence of his argument. Secondly, spiritually, as a flawed human being, i.e. morally, in the sense of being restored to the favour of God, of discounting one's deserved effect and thus of being saved. And thirdly, justification in a redemptive sense: Kilpatrick, the hero and the traitor, assists in portraying himself as dying a heroic death as part of his punishment, but also his redemption. Yet since within the story there is only the worldly, the this-worldly, and in the absence of God, there is no escape from guilt, which allows for the deliberate manipulation of truth, which prevents the restoration of oneness.

Authorship and textual fragmentation

The fragmentation (chaos, flux, multiplicity) of the text itself (the text proposed by the story) has implications for the identity of the author-character of the text within the story, as well as posing questions concerning the identity of the author-narrator of the story, more often than not again a 'Borges' figure of sorts. In 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', 'El inmortal', and 'El fin', this kaleidoscope of roles and assignations is a manifestation of fragmented identities, both personal and textual.

In both 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote' and 'El Inmortal', personal salvation is aspired to through writing, through conferring authorial identity as defining personal identity. Writing is done as salvation, faith possibly desired through writing, or writing as a substitute for faith. In the absence or impossibility of the Divine, fragmentation ensues, mainly and most significantly so: fragmentation of personal identity (of character and author), but textual identity is also threatened, though this loss of textual identity is subsidiary to the greater loss of personal identity. In the absence, in the dissolution of the Absolute, and therefore of a unified, fixed personal identity, Borges attempts to create the identity of the text and of the author. Whereas Molloy (1994) speaks of the fragmentation of Borges' texts themselves, the

'non-fixity of text'¹⁴, refers here merely to the text which the story proposes or introduces, i.e. the text within the story.

'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote' (1939) challenges the notion of singular authorship; it questions the fixed identity of the text, and so the fixed identity of the author. It also challenges narratorial and personal identity. Pierre Menard, in Borges' story which focuses on the text and the notion of authorship, not only re-writes but writes anew (and better) a section of the *Quijote*, identical to the letter with the original - yet not identical in meaning (context and historical time being crucial here). In a creative re-working of Leibniz' principle of the indiscernibility of identicals, Borges has Menard re-create one of possible many 'same', and yet not identical texts.

In several of his essays of both *Discusión* and *Historia de la eternidad*, Borges explores this very theme of sameness vs identity in the themes of translation, of intertextuality, and of the version (see 'La supersticiosa ética del lector' and 'Las versiones homéricas'). There Borges had argued that the non-absolute nature of literary texts implies that there can be no one true translation ('Las versiones homéricas' p.112); that they are all valid, be they literal or not, 'realistic' or otherwise. Herein lies the cornerstone for Borges' assessment of literary precursors and of the erroneous attribution of texts as outlined in 'La poesía gauchesca'; it can be seen as the foundation for the subsequent discussion of authorship and originality in 'Pierre Menard', and anticipates the on-going ontological debate as to the conclusions to be drawn from indiscernible yet non-identical works of literature whose essence is constituted by relations to authors and places in literary history. Here, Borges' views on Platonic Forms are crucial in understanding his view on the originality of the text. These views had undergone a considerable evolution from his first voicing of his conviction in 'Historia de la eternidad' of 1936 to the *Prólogo* of 1952 to the same essay where he calls Platonic Forms *vivas, poderosas y orgánicas*. Yet, in typically understated manner, Borges refers to this fundamental change to his outlook in a footnote only.

The linear, infinite aspect of time suggests that there may well be a cyclical 'recurrence' of the text, again same yet different. 'Pierre Menard' is a precursor to the

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion see Molloy 1994, chapters 1-3.

idea of the repetition of similar, non-identical experiences which Borges is to formulate in 1943 with 'El tiempo circular'. The similar, non-identical experience in this case is that of reading the selfsame text in the light of different temporal frames.

The implication for text is that it will never be finished or final, subject to endless variations through context rather than content. It is not the text itself which undergoes variegations, not obviously so at any rate, such as happens in 'El fin', but it is the author in his temporal context which will determine the differentness of the very same text. The implications for the author are serious: if we define Cervantes as 'Cervantes, the author of the (one and only) *Quijote*', then, as textual identity changes in the temporal flux, authorial identity is being wiped out. An author can thus no longer be defined, nor indeed define himself, through his work, if that work can be re-written, written anew and even better, by another.

By the same token, any writer, and any text, including Borges and his works, are potentially subject to the same re-working of his or her hitherto unique text, irrespective of whether that re-written text actually is or is not: the potentiality of this has implications for actuality¹⁵. For no matter whether there *is* another, identical yet non-same text, the fact that there could be, in Borges' literary universe. In Genette's reading of the story, the multiplicity of authors (and of texts) converges back into singularity: 'Todos los autores son un solo autor porque todos los libros son un solo libro' (1970, 105).

Thus Borges poses, and at the same time questions his own enterprise of salvation, of redemption through writing. For if the self is defined, attempted to be made stable through the writing, and through the ensuing text, then a text in flux, a text which is in constant re-attribution to other authors, i.e. to other selves, implies a self in flux and can thus not secure a stable notion of selfhood.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the 'crisis of authorship' (as well as the hybrid genre of the essay-story), which had been prefigured by Søren Kierkegaard, see Maciel's interview with Lars Olsen in Maciel 1999, 112.

Personality in flux

A fictional rendering of 'La nadería de la personalidad' can be found in 'El inmortal'. In the essay of the 1920s, (p.94), Borges proposes his definition of what the self is, and is not. He holds that 'identidad personal' does not rest in memory. Similarly, Borges challenges textual and authorial identities in 'El inmortal', the fiction of 1949, where he uses Homer's loss of memory (having forgotten that he is Homer and as such the creator of the *Iliad*) in order to void the notion of the unique author. In a process of un-defining authorial identity similar to that worked on 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', Borges un-defines Homer who, in the absence of personal memory, is no longer the author of the *Iliad*. Memory, one of the anchors of self-identity, serves thus no longer to secure the fixity of identity, neither personal, nor authorial.

Homer's loss of memory, combined with his persistence in infinite time, i.e. immortality, result in a multiplicity of selves: he is, or was Homer, the author of the *Iliad*; he is also Marco Flaminio Rufo, who in turn is identical to Argos the troglodyte, i.e. the immortal. Existentially, memory is thus inextricably linked to identity. Yet memory betrays identity, just like in 'La otra muerte', where the Coronel's memory 'confirmed' the false, the adopted identity of Damián. These multiple selves (Homer, Rufo, Argos) unfold in linear, infinite time, the metaphor for which is immortality. The individual 'I' is thus nullified, and authorial as well as personal identity are wiped out by time infinite, that most abhorrent of notions for Borges.

This is mirrored in the multiplicity of first-person narrators and in the maze of narratorial voices which unfold, rather like Russian dolls, into what Genette (1982, 119) had termed 'secondary narratives' within the story, threatening textual identity and fixedness: the first of the first person narrators is a 'Borges' of sorts. He publishes the manuscript contained within Pope's *Iliad*. The second 'yo' is the writer of the manuscript calling himself Marco Flaminio Rufo who, after many travails, discovers that the troglodyte Argos is really Homer. The third 'yo' is Homer, (or still 'Rufo'), who by now, however, had realized that he himself is (or was) Homer:

To be *Nadie* can be read as a reference to Ulysses' sly naming of himself in order to confuse the Cyclops, but it can also be read as a reference to Ulysses' fictional status. Death, as such a final form of linear time, is the final obliterator, the ultimate multiplier of the self into the multitude of all selves. Or perhaps the unfolding of selves brings on a death of sorts, the death of a unique selfhood. Borges' experience of 1928 comes to mind, which he chose to entitle 'Sentirse en muerte'. Not 'Sentirse muerto', but feeling within death itself. What Borges longs for in that experience, although it is not accomplished, is a death of all that is singular or individuated selfhood, of all that is bound within time, of all that is not soul, not eternal, and ultimately: of all that is not Divine. The death of the self experienced in 'El inmortal' is another death: it is the oblivion, the annihilation of self, with nothing to take its place, with no experience of a union of the individual self within a higher self, or selves. A true union would receive individual selves into a communion of selves, through which the individual might then be more truly, and more fully affirmed in, and returned to, his own unique individuality.

Non-fixity of text

'El fin' of 1953 is the third of the stories which postulate the non-fixity of the text and which challenges the uniqueness of the text, and with it its creator. Re-working Hernández's poem and giving it an alternative 'ending' poses the potential of ever-more 'endings' and re-workings. The (one and only) author becomes a (one of potentially many) authors, the one and only text becomes *a* text, the definitive ending becomes a possible ending (one of potentially many). Authorship holds no monopoly on the text, just as the text itself is not inviolable, not sacrosanct; rather, it is a mirror image of another text, the same and yet, as mirror images are, inverted. The ending of 'El fin' echoes the ending of 'El inmortal': 'cumplida su tarea de justiciero, [...] él será nadie'. Changing identity brings annihilation, and the potential for the cycle of posing and of subsequently obliterating identity to continue.

One man is then any man, or his enemy, or no-one in a simulacrum of identity which renders him either the same or null. Paoli comments on the nullification of multiple identities (1992, 197): 'Detrás de las conjeturas, detrás de las mudables imágenes que los otros se hacen [...] no hay posiblemente nadie'. This obliteration of the self occurs in infinite time which may be linear or cyclical; either way, time is conceived of as perpetual, never transcending into the eternal.

The theme of one being another can here be read as one man is another man, or the other man, or a version of another man. It is not an expression of the mystical notion of man being (in) God and vice versa; nor does it express the Pantheistic notion of identity and presence of the Divine in the immanent. If this were mystical or Pantheistic, being one in the other would signify plenitude and eternity, both attributes of the Divine which render the self, in its union with God, more truly 'I' and self. But in the absence of a unifying God in the majority of Borges' stories, it is not plenitude, but nullification of the self which ensues.

With 'El fin' Borges can be seen to have reached an impasse, a dead-end in his story writing as an attempt to resolve preoccupations that had dominated his essayistic writing. It is a story where the heroes' personal identities get dissolved and cloned, where meaning is at once conferred (the killing, being killed) and stripped away: 'Ya no tenía destino sobre la tierra'. After 'El fin', Borges does not write stories for over a decade. In his later stories, Borges adopts a more self-revealing voice, no longer the self-concealing voice of the fictions of the 1930s and 40s.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis has been to show that the reflections on time and identity in Borges' writing are symptomatic of a deeper, spiritual searching which can only be answered by a Divine Absolute. The quest for God, though largely unheeded by the critical canon, was a major and enduring preoccupation for Borges and is attested to in both his essays and his stories, and more so still, in his later poetry. The present analysis has set out to establish the vital links between the concepts of time and identity, and their correlation to the concept of an Absolute. I have aimed to add a review of the quest for God in Borges' writing to the critical debate, and to establish the chronology of the essays and fictions, as well as to analyse the interplay between these two categories of writing. This analysis has allowed for the re-evaluation of Borges' work, for the re-assessment of the significance of his essays, and for an elaboration of the significance of his philosophical speculations.

I have hoped to show that the debate has been enhanced by raising the status of the essays; by subsequently establishing the link between the essays and the fictions; by recognising that the essays underlie the fictions; and by setting out how the fictions are organic explorations of the essays. This understanding of Borges' work has become clearer still through a process of identifying the clear chronology in his writing and by providing a detailed analysis of his explorations into philosophical and theological territory, an analysis which has revealed that Borges' engagement with philosophers and, indeed with theologies, is an active and evolving process which allows for the tracing of his thought over time. Lastly, in order to fully appreciate Borges' philosophical and theological speculations and his preoccupation with the themes of time and identity, the presence of a marked spiritual element has been acknowledged in his writing and awarded a close analysis.

Trajectory 1920s to 1950s

I hope to have provided a detailed, chronological analysis of Borges' essays, as well as a systematic examination of the stories as organic explorations of the essayistic themes. I have studied the texts of the early 1920s as first instances of

Borges' philosophical explorations, before tracing the essays from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s in order to establish the correlation between Borges' notion of time and the theme of selfhood. The analysis proceeds to establish a further link to the concept of God as evident in Borges' concern with the Cabbala and Gnosticism. In the analysis of the 1936 essays I have aimed to explain how certain dualities are at the heart of Borges' explorations. The analysis of those essays of the mid-1940s to early 1950s has focused on mystical texts, from Buddhist, Sufi, and Christian spiritual traditions as evidence of a progression in Borges' search. I have traced the development from essay to fiction writing and identified the interplay of themes between the genres, and demonstrated the continuities between them. The examination of those stories which reveal preoccupations with the self and God discusses the quest for the Divine in the context of the fragmentation of personal, textual, and authorial identities. By means of further consolidation, the links between Borgesian themes under discussion in the essays and stories on both their literal and analogical levels from the 1920s to 1950s, can be traced in their reappearance in the poetry from the 1950s to 1980s as an indication of Borges' ever-deepening spiritual search. These later poems speak of the universality of suffering, the Scriptures, salvation, redemption, ecumenical brotherhood, and Christ crucified. They reveal Borges' ever-deepening spiritual search, a growing focus on and identification with Christ crucified.

When taking into consideration certain key poems, and also essays of the period between the 1950s and 1980s, a continuous and ongoing trajectory is revealed which shows the enduring nature of themes which Borges first put forward in the texts of the 1920s to the 1950s.

1950s to 1980s

1920s:

Nothingness of self and God

Takes it on himself to save himself: the sense of failure and of salvation forfeited in 'Mateo XXV, 30' of 1953.

Borges' focus is on the isolated, inadequate self

1930s:

Eternal Return

Compare this with the futility, and the inescapability of destiny in 'Eclesiastés 1-9', 1981

Gnosticism

This heretic vision of a hierarchy of gods, knowledge of the ultimate of which only attainable to the elect, is resumed in 'Para una version del I King' of 1976 which proposes a threatening, punishing, distant God figure.

1940s:

Resignation into time and self

Compare this to 'No eres los otros' of 1976 with its theme of salvation, redemption, and the fear of his own true face.

'No eres los otros' of 1976 reveals a desire for salvation, for redemption, and yet it also expresses a resignation into the impossibility of any such salvation, as not attainable by the saviour of Christianity, nor by the Greek / Platonic gods and godlike figures of philosophy, nor by the Buddha himself. There is no eternity, only unending instances of time, in time, forever fragmenting the individual into smaller and smaller, into more and more individual instances. And again, the distinct, yet discreet link between self, eternity and the ultimately eternal, the Divine, are revealed. In this poem, the self appears individuated and solitary, imprisoned in its own solitude and fashioned relentlessly by time; eternity is conceived of as infinity, the ultimate consequence of time in the worldly sense; and finally, the Divine is perceived as an unattainable God, separated from Christ¹. Borges' vision is one of God who has separated himself from Christ, and so from humanity. Whereas Christ's forsakenness is to be understood as an experience and a fear of abandonment by the Father, yet not of actual abandonment by the Father. This is a phenomenon which is often attested to in Borges' poems: the separation, the lack of the inseparable link between Father and

¹ Borges engages in some interesting wordplays when he discusses the Trinity in 'Historia de la eternidad' (p.19): he achieves an intricate play of words when he refers to Bishop Irenaeus' simultaneity of the Trinity as *un acto sin tiempo* and to the Son as *un mutilado zeitloses Zeitwort*. The German phrase ('timeless time-word') allows for a double play: *Zeitwort* is the archaic form of the 'verb', *el V/verbo* when translated into Spanish in both its grammatical and theological meanings. *Verbo* in the latter meaning is thereby denied the very quality that constitutes its name, *Zeit*, i.e. time. Secondly, *zeitloses Zeitwort* is another of those *contradictio in adjecto*, as is 'new refutation of time', by attributing to the seemingly intemporal a predicate of temporal nature.

Son. The last line of 'No eres los otros' echoes 'Nueva refutación del tiempo' with the resignation into his own self as body (in time and space):

[...] No te salvan la agonía de Jesús o de Sócrates
ni el fuerte Siddharta de oro [...].
[...] No hay lástima en el Hado
Y la noche de Dios es infinita.
Tu materia es el incesante Tiempo.
Eres cada solitario instante.
(‘No eres los otros’)

Borges’ focus is on the sense of abandonment and solitariness of self, likened to Christ’s own forsakenness. The relationship between Father and Son in Borges’ poems is one of actual abandonment, as opposed to perceived, or felt abandonment, of absence of his very essence which is the Divine nature, the fear of the Son of the Father’s actual abandonment. In this vision, God is unattainable because the Son is not seen as in a trinitarian unity with the Father. *La noche de Dios* can be understood as the absence of God, which is ultimate forsakenness. Absence of God is a state of torment, a kind of hell: ‘No hay lástima en el Hado.’ In this statement, one is reminded of John of the Cross. Borges’ *noche de Dios* corresponds to the night of the soul, and also the night of the senses which John of the Cross speaks of in *Dark Night of the Soul* (in Bowker 1997, 507). St John’s night of the soul is the sense of the absence of God. The night of the senses is the spiritual journey which one undergoes in an attempt to overcome all that separates one from God: temptations, lack of love for neighbour, sin, etc.

In Borges’ poems (‘Cristo en la cruz’, ‘No eres los otros’), the vision is of Christ crucified, forsaken, and dead, devoid of trinitarian unity. There is only crucifixion, not resurrection. The individuated self in Borges’ writing corresponds to Christ forsaken, and yet, the forsakenness, in theological terms, is not an actual abandonment, but a suffering taken on and felt on behalf of mankind. Christ’s fear and experience of the absence of the Father is both a physical and a spiritual death, through which the self becomes empty of itself, of its innermost essence, without which full communion between God and man could not be restored. This physical and spiritual death preceeds the resurrection, that is the restoration of oneness and of plenitude. Resurrection does not undo death, but rather transforms it.

Equally, time, like matter (the body) is of Divine making and as such is not an illusion. Borges' texts speak of the desire to undo time, to annul death, the past, one's own identity ('Tema del traidor y del héroe', 'La otra muerte', 'El milagro secreto', 'El Sur'); they are placed in constant and painfully experienced tension between irreconcilable opposites.

The difference in Borges' portrayal of the God figure as opposed to his portrayal of the Christ figure is striking. 'Para una versión del I King' of 1976 envisages being eternally imprisoned. It puts forward a fatalism as to all actions, of one's life as a book already written, of no escape, no choice, and of the choice there is, or there might be: this is barred by a God lying in wait in the fissures of the prison floor. The God figure delineated is a sinister, threatening God. There is the notion of the inescapability of a pre-determined destiny; the presence of an inscrutable and incomprehensible Divine; the lack of free will; and the vision of life as inescapable prison. The themes of temporality, inescapability, and the recurrence of the same are equally noticeable. 'Para una versión del I King', with its themes of temporal irrevocability, seems to me to be putting forward a kind of hell, where the three 'sources of pain [past, present, future] will be separate so that they will be increased and horribly confused among themselves' (Lubich, cited in Blaumeiser 2002, 81):

El porvenir es tan irrevocable
 Como el rígido ayer. No hay una cosa
 Que no sea una letra silenciosa
 De la eterna escritura indescifrable
 Cuyo libro es el tiempo. Quien se aleja
 De su casa ya ha vuelto. Nuestra vida
 Es la senda futura y recorrida.
 Nada nos dice adiós. Nada nos deja.
 No te rindas. La ergástula es oscura,
 La firme trama es de incesante hierro,
 Pero en algún encodo de tu encierro
 Puede haber un descuido, una hendidura.
 El camino es fatal como la flecha
 Pero en las grietas está Dios, que acecha.

('Para una version del I King' in *La moneda de hierro*, 1976)

The notion of the Eternal Return, expounded principally in the essays of 1930s and 1940s ('La doctrina de los ciclos', 'El tiempo circular'), is linked to poems of the 1980s and the Scriptures in the notion of futility in 'Eclesiastés, 1-9' of 1981:

Si me paso la mano por la frente,
 si acaricio los lomos de los libros,

[...]
 si la memoria me devuelve un verso,
 repito lo cumplido innumerables
 veces en mi camino señalado.
 No puedo ejecutar un acto nuevo,
 Tejo y torno a tejer la misma fábula, repito un repetido endecasílabo,
 Digo lo que los otros me dijeron,
 Siento las mismas cosas en la misma
 hora del día o de la abstracta noche.
 Cada noche la misma pesadilla,
 Cada noche el rigor del laberinto.
 Soy la fatiga de un espejo inmóvil
 O el polvo de un museo.
 Sólo una cosa no gustada espero,
 una dádiva, un oro de la sombra,
 esa virgen, la muerte. (El castellano
 permite esta metáfora.)

The Bible text, in two different editions, is as follows:

Sheer futility, Qoheleth says. Sheer futility: everything is futile!

[...]

What was, will be again,
 what has been done, will be done again,
 and there is nothing new under the sun!²

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities!

What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

A generation goes, and a generation comes,
 but the earth remains forever.

The sun rises and the sun goes down,
 and hastens to the place where it rises.

The wind blows to the south,
 and goes round to the north;
 and on its circuits the wind returns.

All streams run to the sea,
 but the sea is not full;
 to the place where the streams flow,
 there they flow again.

All things are full of weariness;
 a man cannot utter it;
 the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
 nor the ear filled with hearing.

What has been is what will be,
 and what has been done is what will be done;
 and there is nothing new under the sun.³

Only four years later, in 'Cristo en la cruz', Borges can be seen to be seeking, yet not fully finding, the answer to the futility of life and of suffering in Christ on the cross.

² The New Jerusalem Bible, p.1014.

³ Ignatius The Holy Bible, 1966, 601.

Borges draws ever nearer to exploring the core of Christian spirituality, yet he remains at a distance to fully experiencing the reality of faith. It can be argued that it is the sense of personal woundedness which underlies and corresponds to the unfulfilled spiritual quest. This is linked to a twofold tension in Borges' writing: the conviction as to the nothingness of self on the one hand, and the resignation into the inescapability of being, which creates a sense of solitude, on the other. Nothingness is thus in tension with solitude, and also with the desire for and the apprehension of Plenitude.

Borges reaches ever closer to a fulfillment both of his spiritual and his intellectual quests, yet does not fully express having reached his place. This may seem self-defeating, and yet, the quest itself serves a delaying purpose: as it is a literal concern as well as a metaphorical plane from which to explore more personal absences, the quest is useful, and the longer it is pursued, the longer actual spiritual knowledge or experience is postponed as it were, the longer a true recognition of underlying causes for his sense of incompleteness and of failure can be postponed. In a sense, he can be seen to stop himself from reaching a conclusion in his intellectual, spiritual and philosophical explorations, because to reach a conclusion would mean to have put an end to the journey of exploration and of transference; it would mean having exhausted the metaphor, and having to put something in its place while the underlying issues are still unresolved. These more personal concerns might then fully surface. And so Borges can be seen to further and further explore, and to be putting stumbling blocks in his own way so as to delay any conclusion or resolution to his speculations. Yet it is these very stumbling blocks which draw attention to his approach. His quest is threefold: literal, oblique and metaphorical.

Borges' mystical explorations display a fundamental omission of God; a tension between pantheism and mysticism; and the objectification of the Divine. The latter is rather akin to magic and equals an abdication of power which is at the heart of the unresolved nature of both his own debate, and his characters' quests. Although a flaw, this is, on a deeper level, a pointer to Borges' approach and can be equated with the Borgesian theme of the paradox. Borges' explorations in his essays, and his characters' quests for union with the Divine in his stories are metaphors for exploring

an unstable sense of self which displays extreme individuality and solitude. This creates a multi-layered labyrinth, beyond the familiar analogy for personal disorientation. Borges' labyrinth is self-constructed but also autonomous, thus eluding authorial control.

There is in Borges the design of a self-constructed labyrinth, the one that he erects in order to have a safe plane on which to explore issues that are analogous to his deeply personal concerns; a labyrinth where he is the maze layer, the one inserting the pointers to the circularity of his own argument, the originator of his own *Irrwege*. Then there is the 'supra-labyrinth', the one which grows out of the self-constructed one, the one which has taken on a life and a dynamic all of its own, the one in which Borges gets truly entangled and lost.

The quest for spiritual unity, for God, for salvation, and more and more for the redeeming work of Christ in the face of a shifting and fragmenting self, a dual self at times (see for example 'Borges y yo', 1960 in *El hacedor*), is an abiding theme and preoccupation for Borges, and one which spans the whole of his life. The development of this preoccupation can be traced from the early 1920s up to the 1980s, with the writing of poems like 'Mateo XXV, 30' (1953), 'Lucas XXIII' (1960), 'Cristo en la cruz' (1984). In this latter half of his writing, from the mid 1950s to the mid-1980s, Borges uses the medium of the poem in order to reveal not only his spiritual search, but himself. In contrast to his writings of earlier decades, he now adopts a self revealing voice. He can be seen to be leaving the labyrinth. In many of his later poems, Borges' focus is on the Son (Christ), and his identification with Christ crucified can be detected. The Borgesian theme of the one who is also the other, every one and nobody - the vexing question as to the identity of the individual on the one hand, and the desire for the self to be resumed into a higher Plenitude - is linked to Borges' portrayal of the Christ figure.

With 'Cristo en la cruz', the first poem in *Los Conjurados* (1985, Borges' last book of poetry), Borges seeks the face of Christ, that is the face of suffering and darkness:

Cristo en la cruz. Los pies tocan la tierra.
Los tres maderos son de igual altura.
Cristo no está en el medio. Es el tercero.

La negra barba pende sobre el pecho.
El rostro no es el rostro de las láminas.
Es áspero y judío. No lo veo
y seguiré buscándolo hasta el día
último de mis pasos por la tierra.

Borges voices an oft stated conviction, that of the universality and the oneness of all suffering and focuses on the uncertainty, the doubt, the forsakenness, and the fear of the Father's abandonment. As in 'Juan I, 14', Borges empathises with the incarnation, the humanity of Christ which made him Man in every aspect, except sin:

El hombre quebrantado sufre y calla.
La corona de espinas lo lastima.
No lo alcanza la befa de la plebe
que ha visto su agonía tantas veces.
La suya o la de otro. Da lo mismo.
Cristo en la cruz. Desordenadamente
piensa en el reino que tal vez lo espera,
piensa en una mujer que no fue suya.

No le está dado ver la teología,
la indescifrable Trinidad, los gnósticos,
las catedrales, la navaja de Occam,
la púrpura, la mitra, la liturgia,
la conversión de Guthrum por la espada,
la Inquisición, la sangre de los mártires,
las atroces Cruzadas, Juana de Arco,
el Vaticano que bendice ejércitos.

The human nature of Christ accounts for the reality of his suffering and for his sense of being forsaken by the Father, the sense of both a physical and a spiritual death:

Sabe que no es un dios y que es un hombre
que muere con el día. No le importa.
Le importa el duro hierro de los clavos.
No es un romano. No es un griego. Gime.

Borges' theme of the annulment of the past are echoed here, and there are echoes of allusion to the theme of redemption through sacrifice in 'Tema del traidor y del héroe', although Christ's sacrifice annuls the past only in the sense that the transgressions it may hold are taken away; in this sense the past is redeemed and integrated into his Divine nature and so make it and mankind part of Him:

Nos ha dejado espléndidas metáforas
y una doctrina del perdón que puede
anular el pasado. (Esa sentencia
la escribió un irlandés en una cárcel.)

The second last stanza affirms the finality of death, and there is no vision of the ensuing resurrection. Borges views Christ's death in all its undignified, human, and forsaken nature:

El alma busca el fin, apresurada.
Ha oscurecido un poco. Ya se ha muerto.
Anda una mosca por la carne quieta.

In the final cry there is a fundamental, spiritual question in Borges' attempt to relate to himself the full meaning of Christ's sacrifice:

¿De qué puede servirme que aquel hombre
haya sufrido, si yo sufro ahora?

What can also be observed is that there is a tension between the fixed and the shifting self. In 'Cristo en la cruz', the poet, the seeker stands before the cross, and turns to God in the hope of fixing the self, his own questioning self. Yet, the very self of Christ on the cross, i.e. of the one the poet is turning to, is shifting, and so is salvation. The theme of salvation which is elusive to the seeker is also present in one of his poems of the 1970s, 'No eres los otros' (1976) and in the short prose 'La larga busca' of 1985. In 'Cristo en la cruz', Borges identifies Christ, the saviour, with *el tercero*, that is with the good thief. What characterises the good thief is the fact that he, the sinner, the outcast, the reviled and punished, recognized in the man next to him another outcast, another one damned, another one held worthless, another man suffering and forsaken; but he recognized more, and beyond reason, that he was also in the presence of a saviour. His request to be saved is a radical act of faith which goes against all appearances and all reason. By identifying Christ with the good thief in his poem, Borges poses a painful paradox: if Christ the saviour is the good thief, i.e. the one who is being saved, then who, or more pertinently so: where is the saviour in the reality of the poem? who and where is the saviour for Borges? For Borges cannot see him, i.e. cannot see Christ the saviour, the one that saves 'Christ the good thief'; he sees 'Christ saved' (*el tercero*).

Borges' emphasis is on the Son, on the need to be saved, and on the necessity, yet the inability to save. Who can the Christ, who has shifted from the one in the centre (saviour) to the one on the right (saved) save, now that he is no longer in the centre, i.e. is no longer Christ? Not Borges. And so he will be searching, and keep

searching. With the words *seguiré buscándolo* there is an indication of the possibility of Christ being found. Yet this possibility is elusive, as the search will go on forever. Although there is evidence of salvation, i.e. the good thief, the saviour, or the way to salvation is elusive to Borges, though perhaps not to others. But there is more: there is the recognition of Borges' own ongoing search, evidence also of both hope and lack of hope. And yet, Borges' pronouncement, *seguiré buscándolo*, also speaks of a promise to keep searching.

Navarro (1996, 714) points to Christ's third place in the poem:

Por eso, cuando Borges sitúa a Cristo en una cruz lateral, ¿hace mal en entender que Jesús puede estar en el lugar del otro, al que entiende, y con el que se identifica?

This points forward from the all-encompassing, quasi-magical yet forever elusive potential of the Book of Books of 'La biblioteca de Babel', because, unlike in the *ficción* of the 1930s, 'Cristo en la cruz', which Borges wrote half a century later, there is indeed one who is saved, and that is *Cristo el tercero*. Yet there is a gap in linking the suffering of Christ with salvation for the poet himself. Borges identifies with Christ's suffering, although his identification does not extend into a recognition of the redeeming nature of Christ's human and simultaneously Divine suffering. Thus, in the absence of Christ as saviour, there must be another saving figure, one whom Borges cannot see, cannot find. This is so because Christ *el tercero* cannot possibly save Borges, as he is - by analogy to the good thief - the one saved, i.e. the one who was in need of salvation.

Borges identifies with the one whom he longs for, the saviour, and he identifies with what he longs for, which is to be saved. He identifies with and sees the one saved, but cannot see salvation itself, nor the saviour. The saviour is the elusive one, the one saved is the visible one, the one who represents Borges' own vision of a complete, healed self. But how could one ever see the face of Christ? One sees the face of Christ in each and every one of our sufferings, failures, disappointments, doubts, times of loneliness, and also in the suffering of our neighbour. This significance of Christ's suffering, and the possibility to identify with it, is not glaringly obvious, and Navarro holds that meaning reveals itself in that which it does

not state, or show. Similarly, Borges' own revelations are discreet, not obviously visible (Navarro 1996, 714):

Todo este horror no se puede embellecer; es bello, pero ciertamente no tiene nada que ver con lo 'lindo', [...] se trata de lo que aparece en lo inaparente, de lo que se revela en el ocultamiento, de la manifestación de una imagen no adecuada a un dios, [...].

In 'Cristo en la cruz', Borges searches for the face of Christ. Compare this to the theme of the face as the symbol of identity in 'Milonga de dos hermanos' of 1965, and the search for, and at the same time fear of, his own face in 'El espejo' of 1976. There is a link between Borges' sense of abandonment, which corresponds to Christ's forsakenness, Divine love, and the gift of true sight. It could be argued that Borges' search for the face of Christ is the search for the face of suffering. Navarro comments on Borges' question in 'Cristo en la cruz' (1996, 713-714):

El brusco paso al tono confidencial de un hombre que no ve (en los dos sentidos) y declara su decisión irrevocable de seguir buscando [...] hasta la muerte [...]. [...] ¿Buscando qué? Un rostro que él no conoce (aunque puede imaginarlo) y que no es el rostro que quizás muchos otros suponen. [...] Sólo un amor absoluto, absolutamente libre, puede llegar sin menoscabo de sí hasta la posibilidad de absoluta ausencia de amor (infierno) y des-figurarse, permaneciendo sin embargo idéntico a sí mismo como forma que se revela y ofrece a todo hombre, a cualquier hombre. Sólo quien pueda ver cualitativamente será capaz de percibir la luz de gloria que tanta oscuridad irradia. Y si, simultáneamente, sabe que eso ocurre 'por mí y por todos' no podrá apartar la vista. Es más, anhelará, más que ver ser visto, sin que ya importe qué pueda venir y qué pueda ser de la propia figura.

In the later years, the self-concealment which had characterised Borges' earlier writings is giving way to self-revelation. In his desire to be seen - which is at the heart of the reciprocal relationship of mutual self-giving or *perichoresis* - Borges inserts pointers in order to be discovered beyond, and at the same time via these very 'flaws'. This is the theme which goes back to one of the earliest essays of the 1920s, 'La nadería de la personalidad', where Borges speaks of his desire to lay himself bare to his friend at the moment of their farewell. But there is also evidence of a certain apprehension to have his true face revealed, as seen by God.

With 'Cristo en la cruz', on one level, a slippage occurs from saviour to saved. By slipping from saviour (*Cristo en el medio*) to saved (*el tercero*, the good thief), the saving figure, and thus salvation, slips away from Borges. This instability of identity accounts for the shift from salvation to perdition. For the one who might be turning to Christ for salvation, that is Borges - the anguished man of the poem who cannot see

him, who, in his despair, seeks to establish the reason for Christ's sacrifice to whose redeeming deed he remains an outsider - there is only a void, with yet both saviour and saved 'in sight', as it were, yet neither one of them stable. They are both one and also the other, not in the mutually inclusive, Trinitarian sense. So what, he might ask with Borges, is the point of turning to Christ for salvation if one is to see only the one to the right, the one who had shifted his place from the centre to the right, from the one who might save others, oneself, to the one being saved. Christ, in the poem, is not at once saviour and saved, but, at least for the one turning to him, that is Borges, neither one nor the other. Christ exists, but is elusive to Borges. And so there is a correlation between the one saved (the one beheld, the saviour) on the one hand, and Borges (the one crucified and not saved) on the other.

This is the culmination of Borges' unending search for someone whom he, on some level of understanding, knows to exist but does not experience. It speaks of the painful gap between this knowledge and experience, a gap which only faith can bridge. And yet, although there may be an unresolved shift from the crucified (sacrifice, dead, yet saviour) to the one saved, this very shift holds true in a spiritual-theological sense. Christ crucified and dead was resurrected.

Borges seems to be drawn to the idea of the sinner, the thief, the seemingly unworthy receiving the gift of salvation and had explored the theme of the good thief two decades earlier in 'Lucas, XXIII'. The corresponding gospel text in Luke 23 refers Pilate's judgement, the call for Jesus' crucifixion, the carrying of the cross to the Calvary, Simon of Cyrene, the two thieves, Jesus' crucifixion, and Joseph's taking down of Jesus' body into the tomb⁴. The link and the continuity, but also the difference between 'Cristo en la cruz' and 'Lucas' is that 'Lucas' focuses on the thief, whereas 'Cristo' focuses on Christ in the thief's place; 'Cristo' also introduces the voice and presence 1st person voice of the poet as the beholder, the seeker.

Many of Borges' later poems, written between the 1960s and 80s, bear titles based on the Scriptures. He relates these passages to his own life in an affinity, but

⁴ Ignatius The Holy Bible, 1966, 80-83.

also with a sense of personal failure. Navarro (1996, 712-714) comments on Borges' literary and personal relationship with the Scriptures:

Charlando acerca algunos comentarios de Nietzsche referidos al cristianismo, Borges dijo: 'Todo eso parece tan acartonado y tan viejo comparado con los evangelios, que son contemporáneos, o mejor dicho, futuros todavía.'

(Navarro, 1996, 712, quoting Borges in an interview with Osvaldo Ferrari)

Para Borges lo más importante del mundo y de la vida fue la literatura. Allí sí sabía ver cualitativamente, y es allí donde sintió que un texto literario llamado Evangelio era más que literario, sobre todo en el momento en el que crucifican a su personaje.

In 'Lucas, XXIII' (*El Hacedor*, 1960), the good thief displays a blind faith in the Divinity of the man hanging on a cross next to him:

Gentil o hebreo o simplemente un hombre
Cuya cara en el tiempo se ha perdido;
Ya no rescataremos del olvido
Las silenciosas letras de su nombre.

Supo de la clemencia lo que puede
Saber un bandolero que Judea
Clava a una cruz. Del tiempo que antecede
Nada alcanzamos hoy. En su tarea

Última de morir crucificado,
Oyó, entre los escarnios de la gente,
Que el que estaba muriéndose a su lado
Era Dios y le dijo ciegamente:

In contrast to 'Cristo en la cruz', there is in this earlier poem the vision not only of the crucifixion (death), but also of the resurrection (Paradise, eternal life):

*Acuérdate de mí cuando vinieres
A tu reino, y la voz inconcebible
Que un día juzgará a todos los seres
Le prometió desde la Cruz terrible*

El Paraíso. Nada más dijeron
Hasta que vino el fin, pero la historia
No dejará que muera la memoria
De aquella tarde en que los dos murieron.

Borges places an original and revealing highlight onto the thief's act. In an emotional call, *oh amigos*, he emphasizes the fact that it is his daring to ask, despite his sinfulness, it is his sinfulness, that is his human nature, that he is enabled to ask for the gift of Christ's pardon and love:

Oh, amigos, la inocencia de este amigo
De Jesucristo, ese candor que hizo
Que pidiera y ganara el Paraíso
Desde las ignominias del castigo,

Era el que tantas veces al pecado
Lo arrojó y al azar ensangrentado.

In this poem of the 1960s, the focus is on the good thief, his innocence, trust and faith beyond knowledge and reason, which open up the possibility of salvation despite, or perhaps because of his human failings. The same *inocencia* and *candor* which he displays in his asking for Christ's salvation are also at the heart of the thief's trespasses, the all-too-human, but also: it is at the heart of his redemption. His weakness is therefore also his strength; what limits him is also what liberates him; what makes him human brings him closer to the Divine. In his poem Borges speaks of the possibility of salvation by turning to God in all one's humanity, and against all reason, in a radical act of faith.

Borges' quest in the 1920s to 1950s corresponds to the questions asked in the later poems (the meaning of suffering, the elusiveness of salvation, sinfulness, failure). The Borgesian theme of the identity of the one with the other and with all is linked to the dynamic between the question asked and the answer which Borges seeks yet does not find. Yet on another level, Borges' questioning in the poem points to more than an expression of frustration at personal failure. Navarro (1996, 714) holds that, rather than pointing to what a large portion of the critical body have perceived as Borges' agnosticism. It is a voicing of a deeply spiritual question: Borges poses, in personal, intimate fashion, a question which is universally pertinent to all seekers of the spiritual truth in Christianity. In the following quotes by Navarro (1996, 714) Christ's suffering is related to Borges and to humanity at large:

‘¿De qué puede servirme que aquel hombre haya sufrido, si yo sufro ahora?’ Versos estos que a muchos han parecido irreverentes, y de los que casi toda la crítica académica (literaria, filosófica, teológica) ha dicho que es un lugar en el que Borges declara con melancolía su agnosticismo.

Cito a Balthasar: ‘La realidad de hecho de que un ser humano [...] ha sido crucificado dos mil años atrás (con otros miles de hombres), por amor de mí, ¿cómo podría motivarme a cambiar de vida? ¿Por ternura hacia este amor, que nadie me puede demostrar? Se habla de sustitución vicaria, pero una sustitución tal es válida, ruego que entiendan, únicamente si me ha implicado.’ Borges no sólo pregunta bien, sino que sitúa correctamente una interrogación que plantea uno de los pocos problemas que la teología, y los cristianos con su propia existencia, debieran no abandonar jamás en su búsqueda, si quieren que la respuesta sea real: o mi dolor y mi sufrimiento están verdaderamente asociados a la pasión de Cristo, y sus contemporáneos con ella, o la fe, como respuesta y sentido, se torna insuficiente, porque no confiere al que padece la vitalidad que procede de la Pascua de Cristo, ya que el vínculo con ella es difuso, cuando debiera ser configurador. En otras palabras:

al asumir Dios (y al asumir de un modo determinado) la condición humana y al ascenderla (en Cristo) yo soy hecho forma de Cristo al descender la condición divina a mí por su Espíritu.

In that I am assumed by Christ in all my humanity, my humanity has been integrated into the Divine and the Trinity; in God's descent to earth as man, Christ has been made human, and a divinisation of human suffering occurs, and also the humanization of the Divine. I am made Christ, and so Christ is in me. This is a mutual, reciprocal, dynamic and yet simultaneous process, which is, in its essence, Trinitarian. It is at the heart of the notion of the mystical body of Christ, and so one (individual) is all (individuals) in Christ.

Navarro (1996, 714-715) highlights the link between individual suffering and individual identity in relation to universality; he also links Borges' later theme of universal brotherhood and the notion of communion⁵:

A lo largo de toda la obra de Borges hay un raro equilibrio entre la idea de que cada hombre puede ser todos, de que cada vida puede ser vivida en nombre de otro, de que 'un hombre puede ser todos los hombres' o 'todo para todos, como el Apóstol', y la idea de que esto no desdibuja, sobre todo en el momento del sufrimiento, la identidad. Es la idea de que los individuos no pueden ser 'sumados', de que el dolor de cada uno es único porque 'el dolor no es acumulable'. Esto le permitió escribir: 'Por eso no es injusto que una desobediencia en un jardín contamine al género humano; por eso no es injusto que la crucifixión de un judío baste para salvarlo.'

La pregunta de Borges [...] es una pregunta que debiera hacerse todo cristiano y, a la larga, todo hombre.

There is a constant necessity for the human question in relation to the Divine answer in Christ (Navarro 1996, 715-716):

Por eso hay que buscarlo [lo divino] siempre, preguntar siempre ... No se entiende la revelación si no es como respuesta a la pregunta de la humanidad. Si la pregunta desaparece, se sustituye o se disminuye, resulta superflua la respuesta [...]. Seguridad que destruye la respuesta al olvidar la búsqueda. [...]. Balthasar recuerda la frase insistente de Agustín: 'Si has entendido, no es Dios.'

Vinculando la pregunta humana [Balthasar], que no debe ser abandonada, con la respuesta de Cristo que se manifiesta contemporánea de esa pregunta. [...] Esto significa que la figura de la dramática pregunta humana está ya la dramática respuesta divina. [...] 'La pregunta alcanza su culmen trascendente, como horizonte insuperable, en el grito abismático de la cruz. Es el reverso de toda resignación religiosa que se diluye en un horizonte absoluto, pero sin dramatismo... Y sobre este grito estalla, [...] el paso del Sábado Santo a Pascua. [...] respuesta única a todas las veces del preguntar, y no: respuesta acumulable y sabida de una vez por todas y como si la pregunta sobrase. Hay que preguntar y representar ahora, hay un demasiado tarde.'

⁵ For a discussion of Borges' question as to the relationship between Christ's suffering and one's own see Eduardo Graham's *Conversión de la teología* (cited in Navarro 1996, 714).

'Sufro ahora'; '¿de qué me sirve?'. Drama y pregunta ante Cristo, otro sufriente, del que no todos parecen dar razón, pero cuyo rostro hay que seguir buscando.

The relationship between answer and question is therefore at once dynamic and simultaneous; the same dynamic operates between *I* and *you* and is mirrored in the dynamic between the ascent and the descent of Christ, *ascender* [...] *descender*. The man, the individual in Christ, one in the other: this is a constant, mutual, and reciprocal relationship of simultaneous diversity and unity, which is the essence of the Trinity.

In the course of his writing, Borges often hints at the notion of the absolute word, the word which encapsulates all and everything, and which he himself has attempted to 'translate', for instance in 'Mateo XXV, 30' of 1953 (El Otro, El Mismo, 1964). For Borges, this elusive, unutterable Word holds beauty beyond finiteness, and mystery. It is voiced from deep within his own self, and can be associated with Christ⁶. But there speaks also a self-castigating voice, accusatory of his failures and shortcomings. In this fusion of self-voice, and Divine voice, Borges' ambivalence towards the Divine becomes apparent. In 'Mateo XXV, 30' Borges' translation of the Divine word is self-accusatory, and the Gospel passage of the futility and vanity of all striving is taken up. Borges' *palabra* is the Word made flesh, Christ, as in John 1, 14. 'Mateo XXV, 30' commences thus:

El primer puente de Constitución y a mis pies
Fragor de trenes que tejían laberintos de hierro.
Humo y silbatos escalaban la noche,
Que de golpe fue el Juicio Universal. Desde el invisible horizonte
Y desde el centro de mi ser, una voz infinita
Dijo estas cosas (estas cosas, no estas palabras,
Que son mi pobre traducción temporal de una sola palabra):
[...]
Todo eso te fue dado, y también
El antiguo alimento de los héroes:
La falsía, la derrota, la humillación.

⁶ Silesius' *rosa sin por qué* which Borges speaks of in *Nueve ensayos dantescos* is a symbol of beauty for Borges. It could be argued that there is no reason, no need for the rose's being of beauty and of life (blossoming); there is no pain, no mark the flower needs to be cleansed of; no ugliness transformed into beauty; its perfection and beauty is without a previous stain or wound; the rose is not healed, i.e. it is not previously wounded / guilty and thus not in need of healing. The rose is just rose; it is original perfection. Going back to Silesius' own references to the rose, canticles 84, 86, 87, 88, 89, and 91 of Book III (in Shradý 1986, 76 and 77) of the *Cherubinic Wanderer*, speak of the rose as an emblem of Christ the bridegroom, of the red and white as symbolising the blood and the purity of Christ, of the opening of the rose towards the word of God; the rose as the soul (Silesius *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, in Gnädinger 1984).

En vano te hemos prodigado el océano,
En vano el sol, que vieron los maravillados ojos de Whitman;
Has gastado los años y te han gastado,
Y todavía no has escrito el poema.

Says Navarro (1996, 716):

Borges siempre aspiró a una Palabra, vedada a los hombres, que sólo pueden aludirla, capaz de contener y pronunciar la totalidad de la realidad y de su forma bella. Cristo, más de una vez, es asociado por Borges a esta palabra.

Borges speaks of personal failure, the futility of his striving, of judgment and damnation. He looks to his own writing, *el poema*, as a means of redemption and salvation, yet it is the very poem he has ultimately failed at. He perceives his life as a futile attempt at salvation through writing. Again, Borges 'objectifies' the saving power, puts it on solely on himself, on *the* writing, and feels he has failed. This is a heavy and lonely burden, to feel that he has to conform to what he perceives as God's will without fully apprehending or believing in God nor in God's love or salvation. It is also a metaphor for finding or giving meaning to his life, the meaning which would redeem it.

Yet he voices an intuition, a sense of the fundamental oneness between the external, *desde el invisible horizonte*, and the internal *desde el centro de mi ser*. Also, he perceives the Word as both saving and condemning. The Gospel text in Matthew 25. 30 (Ignatius the Holy Bible 1966, 26), taken out of its context, seems to refer to ultimate failure and sinfulness, damnation and punishment:

And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.⁷

Indeed, it is about failure, but it is most of all a call to love. The parable told by Matthew is the one of the talents, which are the property of the master and entrusted to the servants by him, to each according to their ability. Two of the servants put the money to work and gained double, and so did the second servant. The third servant dug a hole and put his talent into a hole and returned it to the master upon his return:

So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him

⁷ Ignatius The Holy Bible, 1966, 26.

who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; fear men will weep and gnash their teeth.⁸

The talents represent the love of Christ. The servants are endowed with love, which finds its origin in Christ. They are asked to be not only custodians of this gift, but to multiply it by loving one another, that is one's neighbour. By loving, that is by investing the talents, man is given more love. So loving is at once a gift, but also a call to give it, not to hoard it. Only in mutual love can the call be fulfilled. So he who does not love, does not receive love, he revokes the love given by Christ, and ultimately loses it. The failure lies therefore in not responding to Divine love, in not loving back.

There is a correlation between the word, Christ and Borges' translation of the word. Christ is the Word, *la palabra* made flesh, as in the Scriptures, and Borges' poem 'Juan 1, 14' (*El otro, el mismo*, 1964). This poem speaks of Christ becoming man amongst men, his kingdom and his suffering. Borges' poem displays an intense sense of the Incarnation, of Christ's humanity and his human experiences; it is an account of his sensory impressions and of human love:

Refieren las historias orientales
La de aquel rey del tiempo, que sujeto
A tedio y esplendor, sale en secreto
Y solo, a recorrer los arrabales

Y a perderse en la turba de las gentes
De rudas manos y de oscuros nombres;
Hoy, como aquel Emir de los Creyentes,
Harún, Dios quiere andar entre los hombres

Y nace de una madre, como nacen
Los linajes que en polvo se deshacen,
Y le será entregado el orbe entero,

Aire, agua, pan, mañanas, piedra y lirio,
Pero después la sangre del martirio,
El escarnio, los clavos y el madero.

The Incarnation, Christ's humanity, his suffering: this is where Borges ends the poem, yet it really is a beginning in the ensuing resurrection. In another poem, also entitled 'Juan I, 14' (*Elogio de la sombra*, 1969), the poet's voice is the 1st person Christ speaking. This points to Borges' identification with his characters

⁸ Ignatius The Holy Bible, 1966, 26.

(Christ; the thief)⁹. 'Juan I, 14', like 'Mateo XXV, 30' before it, speaks of the writing, the word as translated or created by the poet:

No será menos un enigma esta hoja
que las de Mis libros sagrados
ni aquellas otras que repiten
las bocas ignorantes,
creyéndolas de un hombre, no espejos
oscuros del Espíritu.
Yo que soy el Es, el Fue y el Será,
vuelvo a condescender al lenguaje,
que es tiempo sucesivo y emblema.
Quien juega con un niño juega con algo
cercano y misterioso;
yo quise jugar con Mis hijos.
Estuve entre ellos con asombro y ternura.
Por obra de una magia
nací curiosamente de un vientre.
Viví hechizado, encarcelado en un cuerpo
y en la humildad de un alma.
Conocí la memoria,
esa moneda que no es nunca la misma.
Conocí la esperanza y el temor,
esos dos rostros del incierto futuro.
Conocí la vigilia, el sueño, los sueños,
la ignorancia, la carne,
los torpes laberintos de la razón,
la amistad de los hombres,
la misteriosa devoción de los perros.
Fui amado, comprendido, alabado y pendí de una cruz.
Bebí la copa hasta las heces.
Vi por Mis ojos lo que nunca había visto:
la noche y sus estrellas.
Conocí lo pulido, lo arenoso, lo desparejo, lo áspero,
el sabor de la miel y de la manzana,
el agua en la garganta de la sed,
el peso de un metal en la palma,
la voz humana, el rumor de unos pasos sobre la hierba,
el olor de la lluvia en Galilea,
el alto grito de los pájaros.
Conocí también la amargura.
He encomendado esta escritura a un hombre cualquiera;
no será nunca lo que quiero decir,
no dejará de ser su reflejo.
Desde Mi eternidad caen estos signos.
Que otro, no el que es ahora su amanuense, escriba el poema.
Mañana seré un tigre entre los tigres
y predicaré Mi ley a su selva,
a un gran árbol en Asia.

⁹ In a passage quoted by Navarro (1996, 713), Borges offers his view on the relationship between the author and his characters. He feels that the author's most noble side, in his most privileged moments, reveals itself in his characters' most noble aspects. Any created character, therefore, cannot supersede his or her author, his or her creator. This is an extraordinary statement of faith both in himself, and in human mankind as a whole. Says Borges (cited in Navarro 1996, 713):

¿Puede un autor crear personajes superiores a él? Yo respondería que no y en esa negación abarcaría lo intelectual y lo moral. Pienso que de nosotros no saldrán criaturas más lúcidas o más nobles que nuestros mejores momentos.

A veces pienso con nostalgia
en el olor de esa carpintería.

Here, the Divine translation is unlike Borges' translation of the Word in 'Mateo XXV, 30', which is self-accusatory and self containing. The Gospel text John 1. 14 is as follows:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we beheld his glory,
the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,
full of grace and truth.¹⁰

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father.¹¹

In another text of the late period in his writing, a short prose entitled 'La larga busca' (*Los conjurados*, 1985), Borges speaks of the impossibility, the improbability, the elusiveness of a convergence between the 'I' (*nosotros los hombres*) and *el animal* (the Simurgh):

Anterior al tiempo o fuera del tiempo (ambas locuciones son vanas) o en lugar que no es del espacio, hay un animal invisible, y acaso diáfano, que los hombres buscamos y que nos busca.

[...]

Hay quienes lo han buscado en un pájaro, que está hecho de pájaros; hay quienes lo han buscado en una palabra o en las letras de esa palabra; hay quienes lo han buscado, y lo buscan, en un libro anterior al árabe en que fue escrito, y aún a todas las cosas; hay quien lo busca en la sentencia Soy El Que Soy.

[...]

Nos elude de segundo en segundo. La sentencia del romano se gasta [Pilatos?], las noches roen el mármol.

This differs from the search for God, or the face of Christ in 'Cristo en la cruz'. There it is for Borges alone, in his singularity and his solitude, that the burden lies to look for, and yet not find God, nor Christ. In 'La larga busca', on the other hand, Borges, the seeker, speaks of the search for a pantheistic being which is in each and every one of us and we in it (the bird of 'El Simurgh y el águila' and 'El coloquio de los pájaros'; the cabalistic search for God in the letters; the paradoxical book which precedes the language in which it is written; the words of the Bible). The notion is pluralistic, the mystical being eludes *us*.

¹⁰ The Gospel According to John, 1991, 2.

¹¹ Ignatius The Holy Bible, 1966, 84.

The process of fragmentation of identity in Borges' earlier work can be seen to be giving way to a vision of brotherhood and unity in the later poems. The later poems, especially those of the 1980s suggest an underlying, indissoluble unity between opposites, just like this fundamental unity between Cain and Abel in 'Juan López y John Ward'. This echoes, and at the same time develops further the theme of identity of two antagonists in the story 'Los teólogos', and also 'El fin'. It is also the reconciliation of the process of fragmentation witnessed in the stories of the 1930s and 1940s. In 'Los conjurados' for example there is ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity and division between the conspirators, and yet also of unity and universal brotherhood in between that which had become fragmented but what is in its essence one.

'Juan López y John Ward' and 'Los Conjurados' (both in *Los Conjurados*, 1985) speak of the universality of brotherhood, and also of ecumenical brotherhood in what can be termed a prophetic vision¹². 'Juan López y John Ward':

[López y Ward, los dos antagonistas accidentales]
 Hubieran sido amigos, pero se vieron una sola vez cara a cara,
 en unas islas demasiado famosas,
 y cada uno de los dos fue Caín, y cada uno, Abel. [...].

The theme of Cain and Abel is also explicit in 'Milonga de dos hermanos' of 1965 and in 'Doomsday' of 1985. 'Los Conjurados':

En el centro de Europa están conspirando.
 El hecho data de 1291.
 Se trata de hombres de diversas estirpes, que profesan diversas religiones y que
 hablan en diversos idiomas.
 Han tomado la extraña resolución de ser razonables.
 Han resuelto olvidar sus diferencias y acentuar sus afinidades.

[... there follows an enumeration of scientists and artists over the centuries ...]

En el centro de Europa, en las tierras altas de Europa, crece una torre de razón y de
 firme fe.
 Los cantones ahora son veintidós. El de Ginebra, el último, es una de mis patrias.
 Mañana serán todo el planeta.
 Acaso lo que digo no es verdadero; ojalá sea profético.

Navarro (1996, 714) comments thus:

¹² This can be seen in relation to 'Los teólogos': this is one of the last of his short stories and reveals Borges' sense of humour, and the sense of humour which Borges ascribes to God when he conjectures that God does not care about religious or theological differences.

[‘Juan López y John Ward’ y ‘Los Conjurados’) afirman una solidaridad (‘comuni3n’, diríamos en t3rminos cristianos) de la humanidad a partir de un v3nculo que se entiende como real (Ca3n y Abel eran hermanos).

There is in Borges’ writing, especially in the stories (‘El fin’, ‘El Sur’) and the later poems, a marked presence of the theme of the duel with the other, a deadly encounter which confirms one’s own identity through the obliteration of the other, or through obliteration of the face, as a symbol of identity, of the other. In the following poem of the 1970s, ‘Milonga del forastero’ (*Historia de la noche*, 1977), the opponent’s identity seems to assert itself, paradoxically, in the death, the annihilation of self. ‘Milonga del forastero’:

[...]

S3lo esa tarde se vieron.
No se volver3n a ver;
No los movi3 la codicia
Ni el amor de una mujer.

No vale ser el m3s diestro,
No vale ser el m3s fuerte;
Siempre el que muere es aqu3l
Que vino a buscar la muerte.

Para esa prueba vivieron
Toda su vida esos hombres;
Ya se han borrado las caras,
Ya se borrar3n los nombres.

The theme of obliterating the other’s face (‘Milonga del forastero’, ‘Juan L3pez y John Ward’) is reiterated in ‘Milonga de dos hermanos’ (*Para las seis cuerdas*, 1965). The other in this poem is the brother, the theme is of Cain and Abel. Juan Ibarra shoots dead his younger brother and throws his body under an approaching train which destroys the younger brother’s face. But although this is a poem about betrayal and fratricide, it also speaks of an underlying, fundamental union, the brotherhood between Cain and Abel as of before the Fall, which had brought on an extreme and fatal sense of individuality:

[...]

El tren lo dej3 sin cara,
Que es lo que el mayor quer3a.

As3 de manera fiel
Cont3 la historia hasta el fin;
Es la historia de Ca3n
Que sigue matando a Abel.

In the aesthetic philosophy of Schopenhauer (quoted in Sierra 1997, 27), we find a similar concept of individuality transcended:

La experiencia estética se define, entonces, como una transformación que permite al sujeto experimentar la visión de una realidad trascendente. En ella se produce: la pérdida de la individualidad; la cancelación del tiempo y del espacio; la percepción de la Idea.

In 'El espejo' of 1976 (in *Historia de la noche*, 1977), the fear of his true face in his old age is juxtaposed to the fear of the child who dreads the mask:

YO, DE NIÑO [*sic*], temía que el espejo
me mostrara otra cara o una ciega
Máscara impersonal que ocultaría
Algo sin duda atroz. Temí asimismo
Que el silencioso tiempo del espejo
Se desviara del curso cotidiano
De las horas del hombre y hospedara
En su vago confín imaginario
Seres y formas y colores nuevos.
(A nadie se lo dije; el niño es tímido.)
Yo temo ahora que el espejo encierre
El verdadero rostro de mi alma,
Lastimada de sombras y de culpas,
El que Dios ve y acaso ven los hombres.

The recurring Borgesian theme of, and the tension between individuality and union finds another expression in the 1970s. In 'La moneda de hierro' of 1976 (in *La moneda de hierro*), one is reminded of 'Historia de la eternidad' (1936, 36) where Borges speaks of 'la falacia del coito'. This is with respect to the impossibility to reach true communion with the other, even in the most intimate moment of sexual union. Borges' words of 1936, 'aquel terrible pasaje de Lucrecio sobre la falacia del coito', conclude thus: 'del todo en vano, ya que no alcanzan a perderse en el otro ni a ser un mismo ser', to which Borges adds: 'Los arquetipos y la eternidad - dos palabras - prometen posesiones más firmes'. Says Nuño (1986, 38): 'For Plato, the dream and intercourse are instances where man proves the multiplicity of the world'. This echoes of Borges' theme of the individual self which is not in communion with the other, yet also not fully completed in his or her individuality:

¿Por qué precisa un hombre que una mujer lo quiera?
[...] ¿Por qué no han de quererte?
[...] En la sombra del otro buscamos nuestra sombra;
En el cristal del otro, nuestro cristal recíproco.

And yet, one might argue that there can indeed be true union of two selves. When there is the notion of the union of self with God, then we are all one in the Divine. When two unite in this ultimate of human unions, they become one in their respective union in God. In our individual unity with God, our individual selves unite in God and so become one. There is thus perfect unity in distinction.

Borges' search for God, and for union of the self with God, is present in his essays and his stories, from the early 1920s to the early 1950s, but it is evidenced only through a careful analysis both of his philosophical-theological speculations of the essays, and of the narrative articulations which are his fictions. Borges' quest is most manifest, as it is no longer obscured, in his poetry of the 1950s to 1980s. This trajectory spans different periods of Borges' life time, and different literary genres. It attests to an enduring, maturing and evolving quest. Although the ultimate word, the absolute reality, and the perfect union of the self with the Divine cannot be fully articulated, it may indeed be apprehended in supreme art. In his later poems, Borges reveals a hermeneutic, almost mystical intuition of a reality beyond that which can be expressed in either ordinary language or thought:

[...]
Y desde el centro de mi ser, una voz infinita
Dijo estas cosas (estas cosas, no estas palabras,
Que son mi pobre traducción temporal de una sola palabra)
[...].

(‘Mateo XXV, 30’)

Appendix

Chronology of Texts Quoted in Conclusion 1950s - 1980s

'Del culto de los libros'	(1951, <i>Otras Inquisiciones</i>)
'Mateo XXV, 30'	(1953, <i>El otro, el mismo</i> , 1964)
'El Golem" I / II	(1957/58, essay/short prose and poem, <i>El otro, el mismo</i> , 1964)
 'Borges y yo'	 (short prose in <i>El Hacedor</i> , 1960)
'Juan I, 14'	(<i>El otro, el mismo</i> , 1964)
'Milonga de dos hermanos'	(<i>Para las seis cuerdas</i> , 1965)
'Juan I, 14'	(<i>Elogio de la sombra</i> , 1969)
 'No eres los otros'	 (<i>La moneda de hierro</i> , 1976)
'Para una versión del I King'	(<i>La moneda de hierro</i> , 1976)
'La moneda de hierro'	(<i>La moneda de hierro</i> , 1976)
'El espejo'	(1976, <i>Historia de la noche</i> , 1977)
'Milonga del forastero'	(<i>Historia de la noche</i> , 1977)
 'La Cábala'	 (1977, <i>Siete noches</i> , 1980)
'Eclesiastés, 1-9'	(<i>La cifra</i> , 1981)
'El Simurgh y el águila'	(<i>Nueva ensayos dantescos</i> , 1982)
 'Juan López y John Ward'	 (<i>Los Conjurados</i> , 1985)
'Cristo en la cruz'	(1984, first in <i>Los Conjurados</i> , 1985)
'Doomsday'	(second in <i>Los Conjurados</i> , 1985)
'La larga busca'	(short prose, <i>Los conjurados</i> , 1985)

Poems 1950s - 1980s in chronological order:

Mateo XXV, 30

(1953, *El otro, el mismo*, 1964)

El primer puente de Constitución y a mis pies
Fragor de trenes que tejían laberintos de hierro.
Humo y silbatos escalaban la noche,
Que de golpe fue el Juicio Universal. Desde el invisible horizonte
Y desde el centro de mi ser, una voz infinita
Dijo estas cosas (estas cosas, no estas palabras,
Que son mi pobre traducción temporal de una sola palabra):

-Estrellas, pan, bibliotecas orientales y occidentales,
Naipes, tableros de ajedrez, galerías, claraboyas y sótanos
Un cuerpo humano para andar por la tierra,
Uñas que crecen en la noche, en la muerte,
Sombra que olvida, atareados espejos que multiplican,
Declives de la música, la más dócil de las formas del tiempo,
Fronteras del Brasil y del Uruguay, caballos y mañanas,
Una pesa de bronce y un ejemplar del la Saga de Grettir,
Álgebra y fuego, la carga de Junín en tu sangre,
Días más populosos que Balzac, el olor de la madre selva,
Amor y víspera de amor y recuerdos intolerables
El sueño como un tesoro enterrado, el dadivoso azar
Y la memoria, que el hombre no mira sin vértigo,

Todo eso te fue dado, y también
El antiguo alimento de los héroes:
La falsía, la derrota, la humillación.
En vano te hemos prodigado el océano,
En vano el sol, que vieron los maravillados ojos de Whitman;
Has gastado los años y te han gastado,
Y todavía no has escrito el poema.

Lucas, XXIII

(*El Hacedor*, 1960)

Gentil o hebreo o simplemente un hombre
Cuya cara en el tiempo se ha perdido;
Ya no rescataremos del olvido
Las silenciosas letras de su nombre.

Supo de la clemencia lo que puede
Saber un bandolero que Judea
Clava a una cruz. Del tiempo que antecede
Nada alcanzamos hoy. En su tarea

Última de morir crucificado,
Oyó, entre los escarnios de la gente,
Que el que estaba muriéndose a su lado
Era Dios y le dijo ciegamente:

*Acuérdate de mí cuando vinieres
A tu reino, y la voz inconcebible*

Que un día juzgará a todos los seres
Le prometió desde la Cruz terrible

El Paraíso. Nada más dijeron
Hasta que vino el fin, pero la historia
No dejará que muera la memoria
De aquella tarde en que los dos murieron.

Oh, amigos, la inocencia de este amigo
De Jesucristo, ese candor que hizo
Que pidiera y ganara el Paraíso
Desde las ignominias del castigo,

Era el que tantas veces al pecado
Lo arrojó y al azar ensangrentado.

Juan I, 14

(El otro, el mismo, 1964)

Refieren las historias orientales
La de aquel rey del tiempo, que sujeto
A tedio y esplendor, sale en secreto
Y solo, a recorrer los arrabales

Y a perderse en la turba de las gentes
De rudas manos y de oscuros nombres;
Hoy, como aquel Emir de los Creyentes,
Harún, Dios quiere andar entre los hombres

Y nace de una madre, como nacen
Los linajes que en polvo se deshacen,
Y le será entregado el orbe entero,

Aire, agua, pan, mañanas, piedra y lirio,
Pero después la sangre del martirio,
El escarnio, los clavos y el madero.

Milonga de dos hermanos

(Para las seis cuerdas, 1965)

Traiga cuentos la guitarra
[...]

[...]
El tren lo dejó sin cara,
Que es lo que el mayor quería.

Así de manera fiel
Conté la historia hasta el fin;
Es la historia de Caín
Que sigue matando a Abel.

No será menos un enigma esta hoja
que las de Mis libros sagrados
ni aquellas otras que repiten
las bocas ignorantes,
creyéndolas de un hombre, no espejos
oscuros del Espíritu.
Yo que soy el Es, el Fue y el Será,
vuelvo a condescender al lenguaje,
que es tiempo sucesivo y emblema.
Quien juega con un niño juega con algo
cercano y misterioso;
yo quise jugar con Mis hijos.
Estuve entre ellos con asombro y ternura.
Por obra de una magia
nacé curiosamente de un vientre.
Viví hechizado, encarcelado en un cuerpo
y en la humildad de un alma.
Conocí la memoria,
esa moneda que no es nunca la misma.
Conocí la esperanza y el temor,
esos dos rostros del incierto futuro.
Conocí la vigilia, el sueño, los sueños,
la ignorancia, la carne,
los torpes laberintos de la razón,
la amistad de los hombres,
la misteriosa devoción de los perros.
Fui amado, comprendido, alabado y pendí de una cruz.
Bebí la copa hasta las heces.
Vi por Mis ojos lo que nunca había visto:
la noche y sus estrellas.
Conocí lo pulido, lo arenoso, lo desparejo, lo áspero,
el sabor de la miel y de la manzana,
el agua en la garganta de la sed,
el peso de un metal en la palma,
la voz humana, el rumor de unos pasos sobre la hierba,
el olor de la lluvia en Galilea,
el alto grito de los pájaros.
Conocí también la amargura.
He encomendado esta escritura a un hombre cualquiera;
no será nunca lo que quiero decir,
no dejará de ser su reflejo.
Desde Mi eternidad caen estos signos.
Que otro, no el que es ahora su amanuense, escriba el poema.
Mañana seré un tigre entre los tigres
y predicaré Mi ley a su selva,
a un gran árbol en Asia.
A veces pienso con nostalgia
en el olor de esa carpintería.

No eres los otros

(*La moneda de hierro*, 1976)

[...] No te salvan la agonía de Jesús o de Sócrates
ni el fuerte Siddharta de oro [...]
[...] No hay lástima en el Hado
Y la noche de Dios es infinita.
Tu materia es el incesante Tiempo.
Eres cada solitario instante.

La moneda de hierro

(*La moneda de hierro*, 1976)

[...] ¿Por qué precisa un hombre que una mujer lo quiera?
[...] ¿Por qué no han de quererte?
[...] En la sombra del otro buscamos nuestra sombra;
En el cristal del otro, nuestro cristal recíproco.

Para una versión del I King

(*La moneda de hierro*, 1976)

El porvenir es tan irrevocable
Como el rígido ayer. No hay una cosa
Que no sea una letra silenciosa
De la eterna escritura indescifrable
Cuyo libro es el tiempo. Quien se aleja
De su casa ya ha vuelto. Nuestra vida
Es la senda futura y recorrida.
Nada nos dice adiós. Nada nos deja.
No te rindas. La ergástula es oscura;
La firme trama es de incesante hierro,
Pero en algún encodo de tu encierro
Puede haber un descuido, una hendidura.
El camino es fatal como la flecha
Pero en las grietas está Dios, que acecha.

El espejo

(1976, *Historia de la noche*, 1977)

YO, DE NIÑO [*sic*], temía que el espejo
me mostrara otra cara o una ciega
Máscara impersonal que ocultaría
Algo sin duda atroz. Temí asimismo
Que el silencioso tiempo del espejo
Se desviara del curso cotidiano
De las horas del hombre y hospedara
En su vago confín imaginario
Seres y formas y colores nuevos.
(A nadie se lo dije; el niño es tímido.)
Yo temo ahora que el espejo encierre
El verdadero rostro de mi alma,
Lastimada de sombras y de culpas,
El que Dios ve y acaso ven los hombres.

Milonga del forastero

(*Historia de la noche*, 1977)

La historia corre pareja,
La historia siempre es igual;
La cuentan en Buenos Aires
Y en la campaña oriental.

Siempre son dos los que tallan,
Un propio y un forastero;
Siempre es de tarde. En la tarde
Está luciendo el lucero.

Nunca se han visto la cara,
No se volverán a ver;
No se disputan los haberes
Ni el amor de una mujer.

Al forastero le han dicho
Que en el pago hay un valiente.
Para probarlo ha venido
Y lo busca entre la gente.

Lo convida de buen modo,
No alza la voz ni amenaza;
Se entienden y van saliendo
Para no ofender la casa.

Ya se cruzan los puñales,
Ya se enredó la madeja,
Ya quedó tendido un hombre
Que muere y que no se queja.

Sólo esa tarde se vieron.
No se volverán a ver;
No los movió la codicia
Ni el amor de una mujer.

No vale ser el más diestro,
No vale ser el más fuerte;
Siempre él que muere es aquél
Que vino a buscar la muerte.

Para esa prueba vivieron
Toda su vida esos hombres;
Ya se han borrado las caras,
Ya se borrarán los nombres.

Si me paso la mano por la frente,
si acaricio los lomos de los libros,
[...]
si la memoria me devuelve un verso,
repito lo cumplido innumerables
veces en mi camino señalado.
No puedo ejecutar un acto nuevo,
Tejo y torno a tejer la misma fábula, repito un repetido endecasílabo,
Digo lo que los otros me dijeron,
Siento las mismas cosas en la misma
hora del día o de la abstracta noche.
Cada noche la misma pesadilla,
Cada noche el rigor del laberinto.
Soy la fatiga de un espejo inmóvil
O el polvo de un museo.
Sólo una cosa no gustada espero,
una dádiva, un oro de la sombra,
esa virgen, la muerte. (El castellano
permite esta metáfora.)

Cristo en la cruz*(1984, Los Conjurados, 1985)*

Cristo en la cruz. Los pies tocan la tierra.
Los tres maderos son de igual altura.
Cristo no está en el medio. Es el tercero.
La negra barba pende sobre el pecho.
El rostro no es el rostro de las láminas.
Es áspero y judío. No lo veo
y seguiré buscándolo hasta el día
último de mis pasos por la tierra.

El hombre quebrantado sufre y calla.
La corona de espinas lo lastima.
No lo alcanza la befa de la plebe
que ha visto su agonía tantas veces.
La suya o la de otro. Da lo mismo.
Cristo en la cruz. Desordenadamente
piensa en el reino que tal vez lo espera,
piensa en una mujer que no fue suya.

No le está dado ver la teología,
la idescifrable Trinidad, los gnósticos,
las catedrales, la navaja de Occam,
la púrpura, la mitra, la liturgia,
la conversión de Guthrum por la espada,
la Inquisición, la sangre de los mártires,
las atroces Cruzadas, Juana de Arco,
el Vaticano que bendice ejércitos.

Sabe que no es un dios y que es un hombre
que muere con el día. No le importa.
Le importa el duro hierro de los clavos.

No es un romano. No es un griego. Gime.

Nos ha dejado espléndidas metáforas
y una doctrina del perdón que puede
anular el pasado. (Esa sentencia
la escribió un irlandés en una cárcel.)

El alma busca el fin, apresurada.
Ha oscurecido un poco. Ya se ha muerto.
Anda una mosca por la carne quieta.

¿De qué puede servirme que aquel hombre
haya sufrido, si yo sufro ahora?

Doomsday

(Los Conjurados, 1985)

Será cuando la trompeta resuene, como escribe San Juan el Teólogo.

[...]

Fue en Israel cuando la loba clavó en la cruz la carne de Cristo, pero no sólo entonces.

Ocurre en cada pulsación de tu sangre.

No hay un instante que no pueda ser el cráter del Infierno.

No hay un instante que no pueda ser el agua del Paraíso.

No hay un instante que no esté cargado como un arma.

En cada instante puedes ser Caín o Siddharta, la máscara o el rostro.

En cada instante puede revelarte su amor Helena de Troya.

En cada instante el gallo puede haber cantado tres veces.

En cada instante la clepsidra deja caer la última gota.

Juan López y John Ward

(Los Conjurados, 1985)

[López y Ward, los dos antagonistas accidentales]

Hubieran sido amigos, pero se vieron una sola vez cara a cara,
en unas islas demasiado famosas,

y cada uno de los dos fue Caín, y cada uno, Abel. [...].

Los Conjurados

(Los Conjurados, 1985)

En el centro de Europa están conspirando.

El hecho data de 1291.

Se trata de hombres de diversas estirpes, que profesan diversas religiones y que hablan en diversos idiomas.

Han tomado la extraña resolución de ser razonables.

Han resuelto olvidar sus diferencias y acentuar sus afinidades.

[...]

En el centro de Europa, en las tierras altas de Europa, crece una torre de razón y de firme fe.

Los cantones ahora son veintidós. El de Ginebra, el último, es una de mis patrias.

Mañana serán todo el planeta.

Acaso lo que digo no es verdadero; ojalá sea profético.

Anterior al tiempo o fuera del tiempo (ambas locuciones son vanas) o en lugar que no es del espacio, hay un animal invisible, y acaso diáfano, que los hombres buscamos y que nos busca.

[...]

Hay quienes lo han buscado en un pájaro, que está hecho de pájaros; hay quienes lo han buscado en una palabra o en las letras de esa palabra; hay quienes lo han buscado, y lo buscan, en un libro anterior al árabe en que fue escrito, y aún a todas las cosas; hay quien lo busca en la sentencia Soy El Que Soy.

[...]

Nos elude de segundo en segundo. La sentencia del romano se gasta [Pilatus?], las noches roen el mármol.

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